

ANDRÉ GIDE AND THE HEROIC

**CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES**

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ANDRE GIDE AND THE HEROIC

by



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THESIS

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TIGHT BINDING

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## ABSTRACT

The subject of this study is an investigation of André Gide's view of the hero and his ideas on the heroic. We will trace the development of this theme from the emergence of Gide's heroic ideal in adolescence to the creation of his first fully heroic character, Philoctète. An assessment will then be made of the various aspects of this heroic ideal; the importance of freedom in the life of the hero, the faith of the hero, and heroic ethics. We shall also consider the social and political implications of Gide's view of the heroic, particularly in the context of the rise of Nazism and the second World War.

Emphasis will be placed throughout on both Gide's personal opinion of the heroic, and on the various types of heroism he portrays in his works. In treating the former, reference will be made to Gide's "heroic models" - the thinkers and writers who influenced him in this area.

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## Introduction: The Heroic, Literature and André Gide

The image of the hero is as old as man, or, as Shaw put it, "as old as Prometheus". (1) And with Prometheus was born the great problem of the hero: what Carlyle calls his "reception and performance." (2) The debate between the hero and mankind as a whole is unresolvable: on the one hand we have the argument that a man is heroic in terms of his contribution to society or mankind; on the other, a man is heroic because of his own inherent qualities, and those qualities may even justify a certain amount of harm to society and a certain disregard of the laws of man and nature.

The French have solved this dilemma, at least semantically, by making a definite distinction between the terms "hero" and "great man". (3) This distinction forms

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1. Shaw, George Bernard: "Man and Superman", Collected Plays and Prefaces, N.Y., Dodd, Mead & Co., 1953. Vol. III, p. 692.
  2. Carlyle, Thomas: "On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History", The Collected Works, N.Y., AMS Press, 1969. Vol. V, p. 1.
  3. The English have apparently not made this distinction. Carlyle, the high-priest of hero-worship, equates "hero" with "great man", and in comparing Cromwell and Napoleon, he finds Cromwell more "heroic" in that much of Napoleon's fame was based on injustice, and against "what Nature and her laws will sanction." (Ibid p. 242) As such this fame was bound to fade. Other leaders whom Carlyle includes as "heroes" are Luther, Knox, Johnson and Mohammed. In all cases "heroism" equals "leadership".

the basis of the article on héros in Diderot's famous Encyclopédie. "Le terme de héros, dans son origine, étoit consacré à celui qui réunissoit les vertus guerrières aux vertus morales et politiques ... l'héroïsme supposoit le grand homme ... Dans la signification qu'on donne à ce mot aujourd'hui, il semble n'être uniquement consacré qu'aux guerriers ... et les vertus militaires qui souvent aux yeux de la sagesse ne sont que des crimes qui ont usurpé le nom de vertus ... Le grand homme est bien autre chose; il joint au talens et au génie la plupart des vertus morales ... il n'écoute que le bien publique, la gloire de son Prince, et la prospérité de l'état." (1)

Other influential writers of pre-Romantic France have taken stands for or against this type of heroism; every argument can be confronted with an opposing one. For example, La Bruyère praises the "grand homme"; "Il semble que le héros est d'un seul métier, qui est celui de la guerre, et que le grand homme est de tous les métiers." (2) Yet the same argument can be seen to favour the hero. "Grand homme est le genre, et héros l'espèce ... mais l'espèce la plus rare et la plus glorieuse." (3)

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1. Encyclopédie, 1776, "Héros". (1967 edition; Stuttgart, Friedrich Frommann Verlag, vol VIII, p. 182).

2. La Bruyère: Les Caractères, II, sect. 30 (Oeuvres, Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris, p. 100).

3. Lafaye: Dictionnaire des Synonymes de la langue française Oeuvre, Hachette, Paris, 1958.

Throughout the history of literature, writers, periods, and cultures have aligned themselves with one viewpoint or the other. To counteract our three great "Heroic Ages": (1) the Greek, the Teutonic, and the Romantic, we have had Confucius, democracy, and the Enlightenment. For every Sir Galahad or Tristan, there was a Sir Launcelot or a Don Juan. The distinction in each case is between the hero's social virtue and "noblesse d'âme", and his worldly grace and vigour; in other words, between those qualities which make a man great and those which make him heroic.

Modern tradition has sided firmly, and of necessity, against the hero. The heroic idealism of the Romantics has been forced to bow before the realism of democracy and institutionalized authority. The individual personality has become dwarfed by the magnitude of the social machine. (2) Idealism, along with every other form of teleological endeavour becomes meaningless: the Romantic hubris remains, but instead of seeking expression in action and assertion, it turns in upon itself, and, as Blake feared,

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1. These "Heroic Ages" were defined by the classicist Chadwick. (Chadwick, H. Munro, and Chadwick, N. Kershaw: "The Growth of Literature", 3 vols, Cambridge University Press, 1968)
  2. Consider, for example, this claim in a recent textbook: "The leader is not a disembodied entity endowed with unique characteristics...but only in his functional relation to the group. He is leader not because he is intelligent, skillful or original, but because his intelligence, skill or originality are seen as means by the group." "The Study of Leadership" ed. C.G. Browne, Illinois, 1958, p. 7

"breeds pestilence". (1)

Heroism seems thus to have reached its apotheosis. One of Norman Mailer's novelists, Sam Slovoda, thinks that, "one could not have a hero today; a man of action and contemplation, capable of sin, big enough for good, a man immense. There is only a modern hero damned by no more than the ugliness of wishes whose satisfaction he will never know." (2) In this age which rejects all myths, the hero has become "someone who could not reasonably exist." (3)

And yet, mankind needs heroes, and more now than ever before. We rely on our leaders and our great men for our physical and social well-being; in our heroes we seek inspiration, courage, daring and intensity. The hero provides a goal for our aspirations to excellence in an age of the average, the individual, organic essence of man in an age of mechanism and sameness. Moral virtue has become the property of the saints since the time that religion took its place with the structured, organized aspects of society; thus the hero may be forgiven for breaking civil or

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1. Blake: "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", Prophetic Writings, 2 vols, Oxford, Clarendon, 1926. Vol. I, p. 14 (Gide translated this work in 1923)
  2. Mailer, Norman: "The Man who Studied Yoga", from "The Short Fiction of Norman Mailer", N.Y., Dell, 1967, p. 263 Gide reinforces this claim. "Si la réalité permettait l'héroïsme...on le saurait; puisque aussi bien, ces héros réels, on les connaîtrait." (L'Evolution du Théâtre, O.C. IV, p. 217)
  3. Mailer, ibid.



moral laws or both. Whether our heroes are Napoleon, Wagner, Robin Hood, or Billy the Kid, it is their heroism that serves as a basis for judgment, not their social virtue.

In fact, then, the hero fulfills one of man's most admirable needs - the need for an idol, a model who is human enough to permit emulation, yet heroic enough to be unreachable; who represents at once the heights and depths of humanity. Only such a hero can evoke the violent passions of which man is capable, but to which he is in no other way stimulated: adoration, fierceness, daring, exuberance, pride, envy and fear. "Side by side with the human race there runs another race, the inhuman ones, ... who take the lifeless mass of humanity and by the fever and ferment with which they imbue it turn this soggy dough into bread, and the bread into wine, and the wine into song." (1)

The main source of heroism left intact is fiction. Yet even here the pestilence has crept in. Idealism has become cynicism and irony, and the hero an absurdity of our times. (2)

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1. Miller, Henry: *Tropic of Cancer*, N.Y. Grove Press, 1963, p. 229-30. Gide uses the same image of the hero in *Thésée*: "l'égalité n'est pas naturelle parmi les hommes. Il est bon que les meilleurs dominent la masse vulgaire ... Sans émulation, rivalité, jalousie, cette masse demeure amorphe, stagnante et vautrée. Il y faut un levain qui la soulève." R.R.S., *Pléiade* vol. III, Gallimard, Paris 1958, p. 1446.
  2. Even fictional heroism is liable to be condemned for its harmful effects on society. To take an extreme example, Fascism, which is in many ways hero-worship in practice, has been traced back to Nietzsche, Carlyle, Wagner, Byron and even to the whole movement of Romanticism.

7.

The fact that the main trend in twentieth century literature appears to be away from heroism and towards anti - or victim heroes does not prevent occasional writers from developing distinctly heroic trends of their own. The World Wars produced a whole series of writers, in the best heroic tradition led by Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Malraux and Saint-Exupéry. There is however a finality in this brand of heroism, a sort of farewell to the heroic ideal which recalls La Bruyère's claim that the hero exists primarily for war. And none of these writers has found a final answer in this type of life; leadership and heroic action are too complicated and involve too many moral quandaries to resolve the problems of meaning in life.

The vast majority of major writers in twentieth century literature have opted for the non-heroic route. In France, Proust, Camus, Sartre, and Céline all prefer some form of introverted, cynical rebellion rather than the active, individualistic approach of the heroic tradition. Although he is not widely recognized as such, we propose to show that André Gide forms an exception to this general trend. His final personal salvation, like that of Malraux and Proust, resides in art, not in action. Yet, and perhaps because of this, he seeks expression of a deep and significant "besoin d'héroïsme" in his writings.

There seems to be little doubt as to Gide's admiration for the superior men of past ages. We will try and illustrate his desire to preserve this ideal by examining his heroic taste in literature, his admiration for the exceptional, and his constant urge towards the dépassement de soi.

Gide's models are almost inevitably heroic. And he has, in a sense, authorized us to see in these heroes a reflection of his own tendencies, "Pour les intellectuels, l'aveu d'une admiration est une page de confidences. Quand vous saurez bien ceux que j'aime, vous aurez compris qui je suis." (1)

Among the Greeks, Theseus was, of course, his favourite, with Prometheus, Oedipus and Philoctetes ranking high because of different heroic qualities. He cites among his favourite foreign authors Shakespeare, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Blake, Conrad, Emerson and Whitman. Chopin was his best loved composer, and "Wuthering Heights" the book he would most like to have lived". Among the French novelists he preferred were Laclos, Stendhal, Flaubert; and certain works of Balzac. All of these models (with the exception of Flaubert) could be included in an outline of the heroic tradition, and even Flaubert is important in terms

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1. Gide: Letter, May, 1893 in Oeuvres Complètes, Nouvelle Revue Française, 1932-1939, Vol. I, p. 545.

of heroic creativity and art. (1).

Considerations of the ideas of these models, which we will undertake from time to time in this study, thus provide valuable material for the study of Gide's own concept of heroism. Influence is for him "plutôt une autorisation qu'un éveil", (2) since "nous ne savons goûter en autrui que ce que nous pouvons reconnaître." (3)

The second indication of Gide's inherent place in the heroic tradition is his taste for the exceptional in all aspects of life. We shall leave discussion of this important point for the main body of the study: it is however apparent from the most superficial reading of Gide's novels that his protagonists are not ordinary men and women. He praises individualism as the most valuable part of man:

1. Most of these preferences are stated in the essay Les Dix Romans Français que ..., O.C. 7, or in the letter to Haguenin, 23 Oct. 1907 quoted by Claude Martin, in Gide 1907 ou Galatée s'apprivoise, Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France, March-April, 1970. Balzac has created some of the most heroic figures of the Romantic period as well as some of the most bourgeois; and Dostoevsky, although his work, according to Gide, doesn't contain a single hero, is vital for his contribution to the ethics and the psychology of the hero in a modern context.
2. Gide: J. I, Paris, Gallimard, 1948-58, p. 781 (1924).
3. Ibid, p. 175, (1905) Support is provided for this idea by the fact that both Nietzsche and Goethe, two of Gide's primary "heroic models" echo the same thought. "In the end, nobody hears more out of things, including books, than that which he knows already. For that to which one lacks access from experience, one has no ears." Nietzsche: Ecce Homo, Werke, Vol. II, p. 1100. "No one cares to read anything but that to which he is in a certain measure accustomed; it is the known and the familiar which we demand in an altered form." Goethe, ed. by Stephen Spender, N.Y., Mentor, 1958, p.277.

Note: All quotes from Nietzsche and Goethe are my translations.



"Ce qui importe, c'est ce que nous seuls possédons, ce qu'on ne peut trouver en aucun autre, ce que n'a pas votre homme normal." (1) There is little doubt that in both his personal life and his fiction, Gide is an apostle of the exceptional, the extreme and the heroic.

Along with this tendency (and inseparable from it), we have the third indication of Gide's heroism: his emphasis on the will. Again, this topic will provide material for a later section, but it appears abundantly evident from his works that Gide, who is often considered a classical writer because of the restraint and careful perfection of form, never accords full freedom to that emotive individualism so much a part of his romantic nature. Gide must reconcile Romantic idealism and Classical restraint, and the contribution of each to his thinking on heroism may prove the most original and distinguishing feature of that concept.

Finally Gide himself on several occasions clearly states his own belief in the importance of the heroic in life and in his own work. "L'âme réclame l'héroïsme," he claims, urging that the duty of art, and particularly of the theatre is that "il propose à l'humanité de nouvelles formes

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1. Gide: Paludes, O.C. I, p. 415.

d'héroïsme, de nouvelles figures de héros." (1)

In a letter referring to Philoctète, Samain tells Gide, "C'est dans cette atmosphère surentendue que vous me semblez le mieux, car vous avez naturellement l'âme héroïque." Gide replies, "Vous dites que j'ai l'âme héroïque, et vous le dites de manière à me le faire trouver aussi...J'ai besoin de croire cela pour écrire." (2)

Just as Gide's heroic models can be seen as extensions of himself, his fictional heroes, in a much more concrete way, incorporate his own concept of heroism. "Ses idées les plus chères, les plus subtiles, les plus neuves, nous les devons chercher dans les propos de ses personnages." (3) In studying Gide's heroism then, we will consider his characters as extensions of his personal views; in other words, the various heroic attributes of his personality are experimented with and retained or rejected through the

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1. Gide: L'Evolution du Théâtre, O.C. IV, p. 216. See also Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 225 "Ce dont nous avons besoin, c'est d'héroïsme."
  2. Both letters are quoted by Yvonne Davet in Autour des Nourritures terrestres, Paris, Gallimard, 1948, p. 208-9.
  3. Gide wrote these words referring to Dostoevsky, (Dostolevsky, O.C. XI, p. 221) but they could be applied equally as well to himself. In the same way he describes the "pénétration constante" of Goethe's ideas and those of his fictional heroes. (Goethe, N.R.F., March, 1932, p. 370)

medium of his characters.

Finally we must introduce our last (and perhaps most valid) claim for including Gide as a "heroic writer". These characters, in themselves, are fascinating and valuable contributions to the lineage of the literary hero. They are highly original in that they incorporate the old heroic tradition of self-reliance, exceptionality and individualism, as well as the growing trend towards the introverted, psychologically complex anti-hero. Gide's heroes vary amazingly along this scale - from the perfectly heroic Greek in Theseus to the modern victims of their own heroic tendencies like Michel, Alissa and Armand.

The basic premise for this study, then, is that there is a definite heroic trend in Gide's writing and in his way of life. We propose to investigate the nature of this particular heroic concept, along with its ramifications for both the individual and society. With this end in mind, we will consider the origin and basis of Gide's thinking on heroism; the gradual development throughout his early works of a definite heroic quality of character; the ethics, faith and aesthetics which he recommends as part of this heroic way of life; and the relationship between the hero and society. Implicated in our discussion will be Gide's real life heroes and their effect on his thinking, and the relationship between his personal heroism and that of the characters he portrays.

## Chapter I: The Emergence of the Heroic Idea

Gide's autobiography, Si le grain ne meurt, depicts a lonely, withdrawn childhood centered around a strict, overly conscientious mother. Without becoming involved in the difficult question of sincerity in personal memoirs, it could be mentioned that almost every incident related in this work can be seen as a seedling which came to fruition later in an attitude or a work. In view of this, there seems little doubt that Gide selected (or retained) only those memories which foreshadowed his adult personality. (1) Nevertheless, we cannot doubt that the incidents did occur, and even if they only represent one aspect of his childhood, they are enough to support our claim that Gide was, from the beginning, different, and that this difference provided the basis for the development of a cult of the heroic or uncommon man.

From his earliest refusals to play with the other children in the Luxembourg Gardens at the age of four (2) through a long series of embarrassments and rejections (real and imaginary) in one school after another (3), the young Gide

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1. For example, commenting on his rapture at the prospect of a masquerade party at the age of seven, Gide asks, "Se peut-il qu'une dépersonnalisation puisse déjà promettre une telle félicité? (Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 120).
  2. Ibid, p. 32-33
  3. Ibid, p. 95, 147, etc.



displayed a marked inability to get along with his peers. Although this attitude probably arose as a result of his natural timidity and his lack of experience with other children (he was an only child), it also seems to incorporate a certain measure of semi-conscious superiority.

His now famous plea when he was eleven, "Je ne suis pas pareil aux autres" (1) expressed, along with a fierce desire to belong, a nascent pride in his isolation.

The many advantages of a wealthy and cultured background, which Gide took for granted, could have provided grounds for such feelings of superiority. But Gide's snobbery was quite different. His extreme sensitivity and active imagination combined with an inexhaustible desire for literature, music, and poetry to formulate in his schoolboy mind, a vague sensation of being "élu" in some spiritual sense.

He was repulsed by poverty, not because of its "aspect privatif"; but because "il faussait les ressorts délicats de la vie." (2) Seventy years later he would again condemn "La commune veulerie" and reveal "Noblesse, dignité, grandeur"

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1. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 173

2. Ibid, p. 225. For example, even at twelve, Gide couldn't bear the second balcony of the theatre (ibid, p. 226).

as "le fond secret de ma pensée". (1) The distinction is well illustrated by a scene with Abel Richard, the poor son of one of Gide's schoolmasters. Abel exposed his treasures, a pack of letters from his sister, "la pâtissière" in hopes of winning André's friendship. The older boy could hardly bear to read "ces pauvres lettres éplorées," and when Abel asked for his secrets in return, Gide answered abruptly, "je n'en ai pas." Suddenly overwhelmed by the "richesse et rayonnement" of his love for Madeleine, itself only part of his interior wealth, he explains, "Devant sa pénurie, puis-je étaler mes trésors?" (2)

Gide very early resolved to nurture these "trésors", and to overcome his weaknesses, thereby fulfilling the heroic potentialities he felt latent in him. In 1882, he wrote, "déjà l'idée de m'éduquer, de devenir autre, meilleur, m'occupait presque incessamment. Mon esprit était constamment tendu vers un mieux." (3) Thus by the age of thirteen, Gide had identified what would become the first principle of his heroic ideal - the effort of the individual to strive upwards, towards "un mieux" or "quelque chose qui dépassait, en valeur, la vie

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1. Ainsi Soit-il, J. II, p. 1225

2. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 195

3. Cahier inédit, quoted by Jean Delay in La Jeunesse d'André Gide, Paris, Gallimard, 1956-57, Vol. I, p. 339

humaine." (1)

This "mieux" was personified at this stage by Gide's cousin Madeleine, "enfant qui n'était que pureté, qu'amour, et que tendresse". (2) The famous incident of the Rue de Lécat initiated "un nouvel orient" in André's life - "le secret de ma destinée". (3) Henceforth he would love, protect, and emulate Madeleine to the exclusion of all else except his art. This love "par l'âme seule" intensified André's mystical tendencies, but it also fostered the growing separation in his mind between "l'âme et la chair".

At the same time the young Gide's attention turned increasingly towards literature and poetry. He soon became convinced that this was where his future lay. His indistinct feeling that he was among the "élus" received positive confirmation in his eyes as a result of an "aventure extraordinaire" when he was fifteen.

On New Year's morning in 1884, Gide saw a canary "comme un morceau de soleil trouant l'ombre...qui...vint se poser sur ma casquette, à la manière du Saint-Esprit." Filled with "l'enthousiasmante assurance d'avoir été célestement désigné par l'oiseau" Gide felt himself destined for "une vocation

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1. Gide: Préface à Vol de Nuit, Préfaces, Neuchâtel, Ides et Calendes, 1948, p. 59.
  2. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 164
  3. Ibid, p. 164

d'ordre mystique." (1) As if this weren't proof enough, several days later he saw a second canary, again "tombé du ciel" across his path. There could be no more doubt. "Décidément j'étais prédestiné. Je n'allais plus que les regards en l'air, attendant du ciel, comme Élie, mon plaisir et ma nourriture." (2)

This total dedication to art and things "d'ordre mystique" was the culmination of a tendency inherent in Gide's personality from his earliest years. Aided by a fertile imagination, the boy had always chosen to ignore the common, vulgar elements of everyday life for a dream world of exotic colour and excitement. According to Si le grain, he had first conceived of this other world as "une seconde réalité...à côté du réel, du quotidien, de l'avoué" around the age of seven. (3) Besides providing major themes for his earliest works, this inability to come to grips with reality or the objective world played a vital part in determining the importance which Gide attached to the very idea of the heroic in men. For surely the portrayal of heroes has

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1. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 232-233

2. Ibid, p. 235

3. Ibid, p. 52

always been the portrayal of personal, idealized dream worlds: "les hommes, non tels que je les vois, mais tels que je souhaitais les voir". (1)

The other main aspect of Gide's childhood and adolescence which has a bearing on the development of his particular concept of heroism is his ambivalent sexuality.

In 1934 Gide admitted the importance of this factor in other aspects of his work. "Je crois fort juste de dire que la non-conformité sexuelle est, pour mon oeuvre, la clé première." He goes on to show how this "monstre de la chair, premier sphynx sur ma route", inspired him to "passer outre pour s'en prendre à tous les autres sphynx du conformisme." (2)

Besides being at the root of his heroic non-conformism, Gide's proclivity influenced his thinking on the psychological make-up of the hero. The hero is essentially complex, incorporating and maintaining "ces deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan." (3)

Such a dichotomy is only explicable when we consider the sharp distinction established by Gide at an early age between

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1. Letter to Arthur Fontaine, 17 July, 1899. Quoted by Davet, p. 220
  2. Letter to Ramon Fernandez, quoted by Delay, Vol. II, p. 549
  3. Préface aux Fleurs du Mal, Préfaces, p. 14

the spirit and the flesh; and the intensity of this struggle is directly related to his ambivalent sexuality.

But the most obvious effect of Gide's homosexuality was that it set him apart, and we have seen that this distinction formed the very core of his heroism. "Ce qui me séparait, me distinguait des autres, importait." (1) Although it was still a long way off at this stage, the time would come when Gide would consider his early attempts to "renormaliser" (2) a betrayal of the self. He not only came to grips with the isolation and rejection occasioned by his proclivity, but in many ways he profited and grew because of it.

It might even be claimed that Gide exploited his abnormality and that the accusation which is formulated by Corydon's interlocutor is intended for himself. "Vous cultivez votre bizarrerie, et, pour n'en être plus honteux, vous vous félicitez de ne vous sentir pas pareil aux autres." (3)

Gide's development could then be viewed as a gradual movement away from the fear of being "pas pareil aux autres" to a self-confident glorification of that same fate. Such is the ideal formation of the hero: "Ses épreuves même et

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1. Gide: L'Immoraliste, O.C. IV, p. 107
  2. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 368
  3. Corydon, O.C. IX, p. 193

son isolement feront sa force - ou du moins celui-là seul qui les support et qui en sort était puissant." (1)

By the time Gide was ready to write his first work he had already developed, along with an acute conviction of his own heroic "différence" a definite opinion as to the role of the hero.

"Le héros ne doit même pas songer à son salut. Il s'est volontairement et fatalement dévoué, jusqu'à la damnation, pour les autres; pour manifester." (2) This claim, although it was formulated as early as 1890, contains most of the essentials of Gide's overall attitude towards heroic duty, and would remain with him throughout his life. Since the implications of this statement will colour any subsequent discussion of the subject, we might pause here for a detailed examination of the claim.

The hero, then, is chosen or "élu" for a unique destiny; yet he is free to accept or reject this destiny.(3) In accepting it, the hero also accepts a grave responsibility - that of complete self-abnegation for a higher cause. Finally, and most importantly for Gide, it is not enough that

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1. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 228

2. J. I, p. 18 (1890)

3. Gide mentions several contemporaries whom he feels were predestined, but who did not have the will power or the disposition to fulfill that destiny. (For example, Pierre Louys, Oscar Wilde, and Barbey d'Aurevilly)

the hero recognizes and seeks to attain his goal, he must manifest that search and its fulfillment for the sake of mankind.

"Songer à son salut: égoïsme". (1) It could well be argued that Gide spent most of his life seeking that very salvation which he here condemns as egoism. Many critics have interpreted his love for Madeleine and his art primarily as means of personal salvation, to apply both during and after his life. Yet this type of salvation, the salvation of the artist and the individual, seems to be a worthwhile goal.

What Gide consistently condemns is worldly salvation, particularly at the expense of that "higher cause" represented by art. "Ne jamais se préférer au but choisi, à l'oeuvre." (2) Praise, fame, all the accoutrements generally associated with worldly success and often with public heroism, are, in spite of their attractions (and Gide's occasional ceding) (3), to be avoided. Taking as his lifelong motto the biblical quote, "Mon royaume n'est pas de ce monde", Gide compares his attitude late in life to that of Julien Sorel while in prison, awaiting execution: "Je suis fatigué d'héroïsme, devenu parfaitement conscient de la vanité de ce ressort

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1. J.I, p. 18 (1890).

2. Ibid, p. 18.

3. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 305-07 "J'ai passionnément désiré la gloire ..."



qui ne joue qu'en fonction de l'idée d'un public, et des autres." (1)

Only self-discipline and renunciation can conquer the empty lure of glory and praise. Such renunciation may have been a truly noble sacrifice for his art, or it may have been, at least to some extent, a rationalisation for Gide's early lack of success. In either case, he soon learned once again, to profit from and even to celebrate his rejection and isolation. One particularly astute critic, on the publication of Les Nourritures terrestres, pointed out the difficulty in assessing Gide's true motivation:

"sa force principale: il méprise le succès. Il écrit pour une minorité qui savoure l'indifférence du public, et, qui se réjouit comme du martyr d'être vouée à l'incompréhension... Son pouvoir est d'autant plus absolu que sa force de renoncement est plus grande. Écrivain cloître, il exerce un grand empire sur une jeunesse hautaine qui méprise la gloire trop facile." (2) The whole attitude, according to Pierrefeu, "sent le fagot". Yet, it is undeniable that abnegation and self-discipline are inherent aspects of Gide's character, and, bearing in mind his claims that he was

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1. J. II, p. 151 (1942) quoted from Le Rouge et le Noir, chap. 34: Gide frequently made similar claims, for example, in 1907, "Chaque fois que s'est approché de moi le succès, je lui ai fait des grimaces." (J I, p. 249). See also ibid, p. 744, (1922); p. 1220, (1934) and the introduction to Corydon, O.C. IX.

2. Pierrefeu, Jean: André Gide, in L'Opinion, 23 December, 1911

writing for future generations, we can readily accept his willingness to forego the type of heroism which is totally dependent on "des autres".

In a broader context, what Gide actually seems to be suggesting in the 1890 quotation, is that the hero must become, or rather is, by his very nature as a hero, a martyr. "Il s'est dévoué... jusqu'à la damnation, pour les autres."

We saw in the introduction that the image of the hero as martyr is as old as the idea of heroism itself. There seems little doubt that Gide saw himself as such a martyr, tearing down obsolete dogmas, whether of art, psychology, religion, or ethics, and thus freeing future generations from their hold.

This belief became a personal rationalisation for each step in Gide's development, whether it promoted self-sacrifice and idealism in the name of purity (as in his love for Emmanuèle), or complete self-indulgence for the sake of knowledge through experience. "C'est un devoir de se faire heureux... Il me faut m'efforcer au plaisir." (1)

As we would expect from our earlier treatment of Gide's sexual problems, the culmination of this attitude (indeed, probably the cause of it as well) was Corydon. Gide's Défense

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1. J. I, p. 34 (1893)

de la Pédérastie (1) decries the fact that, while homosexuality has more than its share of victims, the cause "manque de martyrs". (2) Corydon's description of such a martyr is probably intended to represent Gide himself: "quelqu'un qui irait au-devant de l'attaque; qui, sans forfanterie, sans bravade, supporterait la réprobation, l'insulte; ou mieux, qui serait de valeur, de probité, de droiture si reconnues que la réprobation hésiterait d'abord." (3)

Extended as it was to all aspects of his non-conformist activities, religious and social as well as moral, Gide's "martyrdom" raises the question of the value of such a position. He himself, while hardly regretting his stand, expressed doubts as to its success and the future use that would be made of his revolutionary ideas. "Je ne sais pas du tout si ma débile chair est de celles qui font l'étoffe des martyrs. Et puis, ils ont de si habiles moyens aujourd'hui, pour...faire du héros un instrument docile et déchu." (4) Although we will be discussing this later when considering freedom and commitment in the life of the hero, it would be well to establish at the outset that much of Gide's thinking on heroism is linked to this sense of duty and martyrdom and

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1. The title of the treatise being written by Corydon, Corydon, O.C.IX, p. 190

2. Ibid, p. 190-92

3. Ibid, p. 192. Gide's admiration for martyrs is also expressed in J.II, p. 126 (1942)

4. Ainsi Soit-il, J.II, p. 1226

thereby, whether Gide wished it or not, implicates others.

The hero, even while searching for a very personal goal, must share his special gifts. More specifically, in Gide's opinion, he must "manifest". "Nous vivons pour manifester...tout homme qui ne manifeste pas est inutile et mauvais." (1)

Manifestation is the expression of the self. It can be accomplished by representative action, or by the work of art. Gide recognized these as the two alternate possibilities or answers to the question "que peut l'homme?" as it was posed to the great men of past heroic ages. Referring to the Greeks and the Italians of the Renaissance period, Gide says, "pour les artistes et pour les hommes d'action, la question du surhomme ne se pose pas, ou du moins elle se trouve tout aussitôt résolue. Leur vie même, leur oeuvre est une réponse immédiate." (2)

As we shall see in studying André Walter, the first of these alternatives, representative action, is initially rejected by Gide as a personal solution. He relied totally on the second - the work of art. Shortly afterwards, however he began to realize his mistake, and decided that it is from life or action that the work of art must evolve.

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1. Le Traité du Narcisse, O.C. I, p. 215

2. Dostoevsky, O.C. XI, p. 268 (Written in 1922)

"J'agirai! j'agirai! je vis!" (1)

Accepting action and art as the means of manifestation, what then should the hero manifest? Gide described in Si le grain ne meurt the trepidation with which he answered this question at the age of nineteen, "Nous devons tous représenter!" (2) This was his "formule", "le pur secret de ma vie".

The idea of the artist's heroic duty to represent the multiplicity of the world is one which was implicit in the aesthetical theories of many of Gide's favourite writers, most obviously in the cases of Carlyle, Novalis and Schopenhauer. A novelist might be valued in as much as he presented an epic, objective picture of the exterior world in all its diversity.

Gide, while describing himself at this stage as "grisé par la diversité de la vie" adds significantly, "et de ma propre diversité." (3) From the very beginning of his literary career, Gide attached his own special meaning to the formula, "nous devons tous manifester". Although not really set down as a theory of aesthetics until 1929, it can be applied to his work from André Walter to Ainsi Soit-il.

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1. La Tentative Amoureuse, O.C. I, p. 242

2. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 332

3. Ibid, p. 333

Gide wanted to:

"établir deux sortes de romans ou du moins deux façons de peindre la vie... L'une, extérieure et que l'on nomme communément "objective", qui voit d'abord le geste d'autrui, l'événement, et qui l'explique et l'interprète.

L'autre, qui s'attache d'abord aux émotions, aux pensées, invente événements et personnages les mieux propres à mettre ces émotions en valeur - et risque de demeurer impuissante à peindre quoi que ce soit qui n'ait d'abord été ressenti par l'auteur. La richesse de celui-ci, sa complexité, l'antagonisme de ses possibilités trop diverses, permettront la plus grande diversité de ses créations. Mais c'est de lui que tout émane. Il est le seul garant de la vérité qu'il révèle, le seul juge. L'enfer et le ciel de ses personnages sont en lui. Ce n'est pas lui qu'il peint; mais ce qu'il peint il aurait pu le devenir s'il n'était pas devenu tout lui-même..." (1)

Gide would take the route of manifesting his own inner experience (a route soon to be sanctioned by his reading of Dostoevsky). But that route could only acquire heroic proportions with the addition of that all-important "tous". Every potentiality within the self must be examined and revealed - every emotion and sensation experienced.

"Ne pas s'enfermer en sa seule vie, en son seul corps; faire son âme hôtesse de plusieurs." (2) The multiplicity of the world must be found concentrated within the self.

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1. Un Esprit non Prévenu, Paris, Editions Kra, 1930, p. 37-39. The same quotation is found in the Journal of 1927, vol. I, p. 829.

2. Les Cahiers d'André Walter, O.C. I, p. 42

In the words of Goethe's Werther, "I turn in on myself, and I find a world." (1)

Thus "manifestation" which at first centered on the symbolist meaning of revealing "l'Idée" behind the "Symboles" or "Formes", became a revelation of the self. The connection between such a form of manifestation and the hero-martyr concept is easy to see. Gide, by revealing everything about himself would disturb and shock the public into an awareness of their out-dated, harmful, moral, social and religious codes.

From this early elaboration of the hero's role, then, we can extract the essence of both Gide's course of ~~action~~ for the future, and that of his fictional heroes. All will manifest, either in action or in art, some aspect of Gide's "paysage intérieur". By manifesting all, even the darkest parts, of this "paysage", Gide risks censure (and perhaps imprisonment) and fulfills his heroic destiny towards mankind. By manifesting it well, he fulfills his equally heroic personal destiny as an artist.

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1. Goethe: Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers, Werke, 14 vols, Christian Wegner Verlag, 1949. Vol. IV, p. 10

## Chapter II: The Development of the Heroic Idea

Having considered Gide's development prior to his first work, and examined in detail the immediate and wider ranging applications of the fundamental definition of the hero which he formulated in 1890, we can now consider the idea of the heroic as it is presented in his earliest creative writings. We propose treating his fictional heroes from André Walter to the first fully developed heroic character, Philoctète.

Bearing in mind our discussion of literary influences and "heroic models" in the Introduction, we might review briefly some of Gide's models at the time he was writing Les Cahiers d' André Walter, before we consider the work itself.

Among the myriad writers and philosophers whom Gide quotes in André Walter, (Dr. Delay lists over thirty), (1) several are particularly important. The philosophy of Schopenhauer found in the young Gide "un terrain bien propice". (2) Flaubert, "l'ami toujours souhaité" (3) provided endless "frémissements" with La Tentation de Saint Antoine. Goethe, or at least the early, romantic Goethe, sanctioned all that

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1. Delay: La Jeunesse d'André Gide, Vol. I, p. 555

2. Gide: J. I, p. 800 (1924)

3. André Walter, O.C. I, p. 33



was tender, sentimental and idealistic in Gide's heroic image of this period. (He read Wilhelm Meister in 1899, and Werther in 1890.) (1) And above all, there is the Bible, which throughout his life Gide considered "contenait meilleur conseil qu'aucun autre livre du monde." (2)

Although there is no mention of the work in André Walter, Dr. Delay feels that the single closest ancestor of André Walter was Amiel, "Le héros public de ce genre littéraire privé, et la plus glorieuse victime de ce que Paul Bourget a appelé "la maladie du journal intime". (3) Gide admits to having read and admired the Journal Intime at the urging of M. Richard when he was fifteen. (4)

The most interesting thing to note with regard to the literary input of André Walter is the fact that Gide later rejected, or at least expressed serious reservations about all the works on that list (with the exception of the Bible of course). He came to dislike the affected sentimentality of Werther (5) and Amiel (6), and even questioned Flaubert's "tenue

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1. Gide: Notes d'un Voyage en Bretagne, O.C. I, p. 7 and Cahier de Lectures inédit.
  2. Gide: Deux Interviews Imaginaires, N.Y., Schiffrin, 1943, p. 49
  3. Delay: La Jeunesse d'André Gide, Vol. I, p. 557
  4. Gide: Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 238
  5. J. II, p. 62 (1940)
  6. Si le grain, p. 238

exemplaire", (1) and, to a lesser extent, Schopenhauer's "morale toute empirique". (2)

André Walter occupies a special place in any consideration of Gide's fictional heroes, since he comes closer than any other protagonist to being a complete double of his creator. (Gide would henceforth employ the technique of partial portraits, having a character represent one tendency of his nature carried to its extreme.) All the contradictions, passions and fears of the young Gide were poured into this hero. "Rien n'appartenait à lui que je ne fisse pour ainsi dire l'essai en moi-même." (3) In fact, these contradictions and passions constitute the only subject matter of the book. "Pas un événement, la vie toujours intime...tout s'est joué dans l'âme." (4)

Because of the extent of this introspection and analysis, and the close relationship between André Walter and André Gide, this first work furnishes especially valuable material for our study of Gide's developing concept of the heroic. Two other considerations give this contention added weight. In no other work does Gide take himself as seriously as in André Walter. "Au moment que

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1. Gide: Un Esprit non Prévenu, p. 54

2. J. I, p. 25 (1891)

3. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 276

4. André Walter, O.C. I, p. 31

je l'écrivais, ce livre me paraissait un des plus importants du monde ... C'était ma Somme, ma vie me paraissait devoir s'y achever, s'y conclure." (1) It seems justifiable to suggest that Gide felt himself profoundly heroic, fulfilling his destiny by writing this chef-d'oeuvre "si noble, si pathétique, si péremptoire", (2) and which "répondait à un tel besoin de l'époque". (3) There are likewise grounds for claiming that every gesture, every thought of André Walter is meant to appear noble and heroic in the best Wertherian tradition. "Bréviaire des Vierges" (4), perhaps, but even more, André Walter is a veritable credo of what Gide, at this stage, considered heroic or to be emulated.

Secondly, it is most remarkable that Gide deliberately, and on principle, as it were, abandoned almost every major tenet of that credo very shortly afterwards. This was to be the first and by far the most complete example of Gide's aesthetic catharsis. By manifesting his chaotic emotions and values he was better able to see their weaknesses. By transferring them to André Walter, he was able to carry

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1. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 301-02.

2. Ibid, p. 297.

3. Ibid, p. 304.

4. Caption applied to André Walter in an admiring letter from Maeterlinck, 9 May, 1891. (Quoted by Delay, Vol. I, p. 490)

them to their extreme without risk to himself; André Walter's madness freed Gide from their dominion.

"Bondissant hors de mon héros, tandis qu'il semblait dans la folie, mon âme, enfin délivrée de lui, de ce poids moribond qu'elle traînait depuis trop longtemps après elle, entrevoyait des possibilités vertigineuses." (1)

A study of this first work thus offers a comprehensive picture of what Gide considered heroic at a crucial stage of his development. Also, and more importantly, it provides a strong indication of his later, more definitive views on the subject by clearly identifying what was to be rejected and why.

This approach may be even more valid if we consider La Porte Etroite along with André Walter. In the later work Gide comes back to the same themes and the same heroic ideal, treated this time from a distance. By 1909, Gide was fully cognizant of the failings of André Walter, and although this ideal still attracted him, it could no longer be justified as a way of life.

What then was the nature of the "heroic ideal" which deluded both André Walter and Alissa? The goal in both cases was the same, whether parading under the guise

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1. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 302

of love for another or love for God: "Rien n'est beau comme la noblesse de l'âme; beau, non, il faudrait dire: sublime." (1) Gide not only accepted the idea of "religieux héroïsmes", (2) but proclaimed them as the noblest aspect of life. Both André Walter and Alissa seek this personal heroism or "noblesse d'âme" in abnegation under the pretext of seeking happiness and salvation in God. And both recognize, at least to a partial extent their final defeat. "Oui, vanité, la chasteté! Vanité! - C'est un orgueil qui se déguise; pouvoir se croire supérieur, très noble au-dessus des autres." (3)

André Walter and Alissa are both in love. Following the tradition of Tristan, Dante, and the German Romantics, they deliberately raise an obstacle to that love. Although their subconscious motives differ, their apparent ones are the same - "aimer par l'âme seule"; (4) "la chair corrompt l'âme...il faut qu'elle se l'asservisse." (5) Both choose unsatisfied love rather than fulfillment, ostensibly as heroic virtue, but, in fact, "plutôt par goût que par vertu". (6)

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1. J. I, p. 22 (1891)

2. Letter, 1892, O.C. I, p. 544

3. André Walter, O.C. I, p. 171

4. Ibid, p. 124

5. Ibid, p. 45.

6. La Porte Etroite, O.C. V, p. 99

Denis de Rougemont in L'Amour et l'occident (1) claims that this type of love, "symbolized by the Tristan myth, is in fact a form of narcissism. "Je m'aime dans l'Autre." (2) André Walter feels closer to Emmanuèle after her death than while they were together. "Elle meurt; donc il la possède." (3) Emmanuèle then, appears to be an idealised reflection of André, himself. (Consider the importance of similarities of background and taste,) (4) In the same way, she is the reflection of his concept of God. Both these reflections represent that "mieux", that something beyond, that Gide was not yet capable of accepting in its abstract form. What appeared heroic to Gide was a vague ideal which he assigned variously to Emmanuèle, to God, and to art. It was his friend Valéry who realized, even at this stage, that they were all the same, and all aspects of egoism. "Dieu, c'est le respect que nous devons à nous-mêmes ... la recherche d'un Mieux par notre force et dans la direction de nos aptitudes. En deux mots: Dieu est notre idéal particulier." (5)

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1. L'Amour et l'occident, Plon, 1939
  2. Gide, referring to this work, told Delay: C'est là, et non dans les ouvrages des psychanalystes, que j'ai trouvé l'explication de quelques-unes de mes erreurs, et des plus anciennes". (La Jeunesse d'André Gide, vol I, p.505)
  3. André Walter, O.C. I, p. 125.
  4. "Seul un semblable passé pourra faire semblables les âmes." And only then, in Gide's opinion is true love possible. (La Tentative Amoureuse, O.C. I p. 329) The same thought is expressed in André Walter, p. 125.
  5. Valéry: Lettres à Quelqu'un, Paris, Gallimard, 1952, p. 21-22

The idealization of Madeleine made up part of the whole illusionary but sublime vision of this period. Indeed, the process of raising her to these heights supplanted any need to love her or to find God on his own. "Tout l'effort de mon amour n'était point tant de me rapprocher d'elle, que de la rapprocher de cette figure idéale que j'inventais." (1) As for André Walter's search for God, it was quite clear, even at times to the youth himself, that Emmanuèle provided not only an intermediary, but very often, substituted for the goal as well. "Je cesserai de poursuivre ton âme," (2) André tells her at last. "Nous cheminerons parallèles." (3)

The same situation is presented in La Porte Etroite, but now Gide, realizing the dangers of such an intensely religious love for another person, and wishing to emphasize a slightly different motivation, makes Alissa aware of the process. Jérôme adores God through Alissa: "Travail, efforts, actions pies, mystiquement, j'offrais tout à Alissa." (4)

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1. Gide: Et nunc manet in te, J. II, p. 1124. Gide later recognized this idealization as applying to both Emmanuèle and Alissa, as well, of course, as to Madeleine. "J'ai cru longtemps qu'elle [Madeleine] était Alissa. Elle ne l'était pas." (Cited by Délay, Vol. II, p. 502) "Elle-même ne m'a servi que de point de départ pour mon héroïne. Combien plus simple qu'Alissa, plus normale et plus ordinaire, (je veux dire: moins cornélienne et moins tendue) ne devait-elle pas se sentir?" (Et nunc manet in te, p. 1123-24)
  2. André Walter, O.C. I, p. 80
  3. Ibid, p. 124
  4. La Porte Etroite, O.C. V, p. 95

She realizes that she is an obstacle to his communion with God, and decides that they must remain apart if he is to attain perfection. "C'est tout seul que chacun doit gagner Dieu... Pourquoi veux-tu chercher un autre guide que le Christ?" (1)

Gide's awareness of the dangers inherent in André Walter's attitude is evident in the ending of his next work, La Tentative Amoureuse. Here the same theme, "cheminerons parallèles" is put into practice. Luc and Rachel "marchaient... chacun regardait devant lui au lieu de tant regarder l'autre." (2) Gide states the morale with unaccustomed directness: "Malheur à ces âmes stupides qui prennent pour des buts les obstacles." (3) Eventually this claim will provide the foundation for Gide's motto, "passer outre", but at this stage he still considers a goal necessary for true heroism, and according to this particular ideal, "Notre but unique, c'est Dieu."

The confusion of love for another creature ("l'obstacle"), with love for the creator ("le but"), is complicated in both André Walter and La Porte Etroite by an additional obstacle.

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1. La Porte Etroite, O.C. V, p. 99
  2. La Tentative Amoureuse, O.C. I, p. 239
  3. Ibid, p. 242



The idealization of the self also tends to supplant true and heroic piety. In the case of André Walter, this process appears to have been largely an aesthetic phenomenon. According to Dr. Delay, "il y a au fond du narcissisme esthétique une entreprise plus ou moins avouée de divinisation de soi-même." (1) The artist, particularly the fledgling artist, comes to adore an idealized image of what he will become as a result of his art. This "entreprise" could help account for many of the emotional excesses of André Walter, since an awareness of one's own glorious destiny is one of the most effective elixirs for heroic deeds or the rapturous soliloquys which can be said to provide their equivalent in introspective art. (2)

A lesser and more obvious effect of Gide's "divinisation de soi-même" can be seen on the level of appearances. "Le souci de paraître précisément ce que je sentais que j'étais, ce que je voulais être: un artiste, allait jusqu'à m'empêcher d'être." (3)

On any level, this process must and did lead to failure, since, far from promoting heroic individualism,

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1. Delay: La Jeunesse d'André Gide, Vol. I, p. 586

2. For example, O.C. I, p. 51. André Walter speaks of "Mes rêves radieux et mes superbes espérances..."

3. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 288

it demands, in the end, "une abdication du moi au profit d'une image idéale de soi." (1) It can be examined most fruitfully as one more phase of Gide's inability to accept reality. A phantom God, an etherealized love for Emmanuèle, and an imaginary self - in such a world action and reality have no part. Even André's emotions became at times unreal. His every reaction was dictated by the reflection of the artiste-poseur in the indispensable mirror. "Pour prendre connaissance de mon émoi, de ma pensée, il me semblait que, dans mes yeux, il me fallait d'abord les lire." (2)

Yet, it is important to note that even when he recognized that this "vie dans le rêve" (3) had no rapport whatsoever with reality or with his true self, Gide deliberately chose to retain it. "Tant pis! l'illusion de l'idéal est bonne et je la veux garder." (4) For even though it would appear to the later, "liberated" Gide as the very opposite of authenticity and freedom, this illusion did have heroic attributes which André Walter was definitely aware of, and which Gide will make the main

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1. Delay: La Jeunesse d'André Gide, Vol. I, p. 586-87. Jung warns of the same danger in "The Undiscovered Self". trans. by R. Hull, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1958, p. 81. "The individual loses sight of his instinctual nature, and puts his own conception of himself in place of his real being. In this way he slips imperceptibly into a purely conceptual world where the products of his conscious activity progressively replace reality."

2. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 288.

3. André Walter, O.C. I, p. 126

4. Ibid, p. 45

motivation of Alissa in La Porte Etroite.

We saw earlier that there is a certain amount of virtue to be claimed for the hero "qui s'efforce vers un idéal" even if the ideal itself is questionable. Gide would later reject any notion of living according to a preconceived pattern or model. (1) But what he would never discredit is the process needed to reach the ideal; for this process must involve the virtues of self-mastery, determination and sacrifice which are inseparable from any heroic ideal. (2)

Alissa could never be satisfied with the happiness that would be afforded by marrying Jérôme. She scorns such "félicité si pratique, si facilement obtenue, si parfaitement "sur mesure" in her friends and her younger sister. "Combien se rétrécit dans le bonheur tout ce qui pourrait être héroïque!" (3) Before long she begins to suspect the truth. "Je me demande à présent si c'est bien le bonheur que je souhaite ou plutôt l'acheminement vers le bonheur." (4) The idea of happiness, like that of God, is a pretext for her real need, "rapprochement infini" but never attainment, never the Absolut.

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1. This point will be discussed in Chapter III.

2. For instance André Walter's appeal to his dead mother could have appeared in any of Gide's later works. "Ce qui domine, c'est l'orgueil d'avoir vaincu. Tu me connaissais bien si tu pensais que l'excès même de cette vertu m'exciterait à la suivre. Tu savais que les routes ardues et téméraires m'attirent ... (O.C., I, p. 29):

3. La Porte Etroite, O.C. V, p. 225.

4. Ibid, p. 219.

Her will seeks more difficult trials, more demanding sacrifices; the reward is in the exaltation of the victory; God or piety play no part. (1) As she dies she realizes that she cannot even believe in God, and so she is left with nothing. "Je voudrais mourir vite, avant d'avoir compris de nouveau que je suis seule." (2)

Pride was always for Gide, a prime source of self-delusion. The fate of many of his heroes can be summed up in the words of LaPérouse: "Je ne comprenais pas qu'en croyant me libérer, je devenais de plus en plus esclave de mon orgueil. Chacun de ces triomphes sur moi-même, c'était un tour de clé que je donnais à la porte de mon cachot... Dieu m'a roulé: il m'a fait prendre pour de la vertu mon orgueil." (3)

Gide may have continued to accept André Walter's sacrifice as representative of one, valid type of heroism.

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1. This attitude represents Gide's own point of view. He scorns "tout bonheur qui ne serait pas progressif", and rejects the idea of a Paradise because of its static perfection. (Les Nouvelles Nourritures, and Narcisse)
  2. La Porte Etroite, O.C. V, p. 238. André Walter predicts this end result of such "religieux héroïsmes": "On devient vertueux, sublime; - c'est le sacrifice absolu de soi-même; mais que Dieu demeure au moins; que Dieu nous voie et bénisse l'effort; sinon c'est le néant de toute la vie et quand on l'a compris, c'est le cri d'épouvante dans le noir." (André Walter, O.C. I, p. 138)
  3. Les Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XII, p. 178

He did so with that of Alissa whom he always admired in spite of her ultimate failure. But the one "duperie" which Gide would never forgive André Walter was the denial of the real motives for the spiritualization of his love for Emmanuèle, and, probably, for a large part of this refusal to accept reality as well. For the reality was, that Gide was still deeply involved in his "solitary vice", and that he couldn't do otherwise than "aimer par l'âme seule." "Je m'abandonnais à cette flatterie d'appeler réprobation mes répugnances et de prendre mon aversion pour vertu." (1) The very essence of his "heroism" - renunciatory virtue - was actually anti-heroic, in that it was a false value.

Alissa's failure could be interpreted as having allowed her real self with its longing for excessive virtue and ever greater personal victories to triumph over the model set up by the Church which required a virtue limited by humility and directed towards God. Her main failure in Gide's eyes was her self-delusion. She didn't recognize the fact that she was choosing personal heroism and thereby losing God.. Although self-delusion is always to be rejected, the special aspects of this particular case tend, in our opinion to mitigate the failure to some extent. Had Alissa succeeded, she would, it is true, have

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1. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 468

found happiness in communion with God at the end, instead of contemplating "les murs atrocement nus de ma chambre". (1) By attaining salvation in this way, she would have resembled Père Zossima, whom Gide describes as "la plus haute figure" of Dostoevsky's novels. "Mais c'est un saint, non pas un héros. Il n'atteint à la sainteté précisément qu'en résignant l'intelligence, qu'en abdiquant la volonté." (2) Even at this early stage, could Gide have completely sanctioned such a victory?

In the case of André Walter, the failure was both more serious and less praiseworthy. The youth's "saintes révoltes et nobles hérissements" (3) appeared to the mature Gide as the very essence of that puritan hypocrisy which he grew to hate. It is true that Gide at this stage may not have been aware of his pederastic tendencies, but a close reading of André Walter indicates that such awareness must have been very near the surface; "aussi bien, je ne te désire pas. Ton corps me gêne et les possessions charnelles m'épouvantent." (4) But the acceptance of such signs as significant must have been a very difficult step for the youth.

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1. La Porte Etroite, O.C. V, p. 238
  2. Dostoievsky, O.C. XI, p. 207
  3. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 346
  4. André Walter, O.C. I, p. 68. Elsewhere André says: "Je m'abstiendrai de toute caresse - pour ne pas inquiéter son âme...et de peur qu'après elle ne désire davantage, que je ne pourrais pas lui donner;..." (p. 18)

The true self could not remain hidden for long beneath the restrained, puritanical facade. Near the end of the book, André Walter has a dream which forces his subconscious desires into the open, and pre-figures a great many facets of the philosophy of life to be developed later by Michel. "Dans la rivière je revoyais les enfants ... nus tout entiers, ... qui s'y baignent et plongent leur torse frêle, leurs membres brunis de soleil, dans cette fraîcheur enveloppante. - Des rages me prenaient de n'être pas des leurs, un de ces vauriens des grandes routes, qui tout le jour maraudent au soleil... et qui ne pensent pas." (1)

Gide realized that such a falsification of the self and the world (even if it is an idealisation or raising higher) (2) must lead to a loss of the personality. He had to develop his heroic ideal to a stage where it would permit and encourage the expression of his true self.

"Au nom de quel Dieu, de quel idéal me défendez-vous de vivre selon ma nature? Et cette nature, où m'entraînerait-elle, si simplement je la suivais?" (3) Up to now, he had lived according to the Christian model, shunning the body and

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1. André Walter, O.C. I, p. 156

2. Spinoza, whom Gide admired greatly, claimed that virtue consists in preserving one's being or becoming what one potentially is. "A man is as much destroyed by becoming an angel as if he became an insect." "Ethics", trans. by W. Hale White, London, Oxford U.P., 1927, Book III, Prop. 6.

3. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 347

glorifying the soul. The tortuous separation of his spiritual and physical tendencies, with neither gaining any lasting ascendancy, had resulted in "un profond désarroi de tout mon être." (1) Surely even God couldn't demand such efforts. "J'entrevis enfin que ce dualisme discordant pourrait peut-être bien se résoudre en une harmonie. Tout aussitôt il m'apparut que cette harmonie devait être mon but souverain, et chercher à l'obtenir la sensible raison de ma vie." (2)

A radical change was at hand. And yet, the nobility of this first adolescent idealism had been deeply rooted in Gide's developing personality. He would never forget it. We shall see in discussing ethics how the acceptance of duty, self-discipline and self-imposed rules are very much a part of Gide's mature heroic image. The temptations of the spiritual "escape" from reality haunted him again and again (as for example in the religious crisis of 1916). But, perhaps most importantly, this early type of heroism provided an invaluable experience to be incorporated into many characters in his work; the pastor, Fleurissoire, Boris, and Robert, to name but a few.

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1. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 347

2. Ibid, p. 347-48



Gide's aesthetical development reflected the same heroic trend as his moral growth. He established in Le Traité du Narcisse, the very important point that, for him, "les règles de la morale et de l'esthétique sont les mêmes". (1) There was a very close relationship between religious and aesthetic values from the beginning of Gide's career, with a gradual shift of primary emphasis from the former to the latter.

Although he didn't become acquainted with the symbolist doctrines until after he had written André Walter, Gide immediately recognized his natural affinities with the group and was more than willing on the basis of his first work to be classed with them. (2) Boisdeffre, in his biography of Gide, describes the attraction of the movement in terms which suggest André Walter's way of life: "le goût du rêve, le dédain de l'action, la volonté de se cloître en littérature comme on entre en religion." (3)

We saw that Gide, even at the André Walter stage was plagued with doubts as to the religious values he was placing so high. His "Symbolist phase" would seem to represent the first stage in the revaluation of those

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1. Narcisse, O.C. I, p. 215

2. Gide's letter to Valéry, "Self-Portraits", University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 146. Letter is dated 26 January, 1891

3. Boisdeffre, Pierre de: Vie d'André Gide, Paris, Hachette, 1970, vol. I, p. 160

values. After being divested of their religious significance, (Le Traité du Narcisse), they are maintained in the hallowed guise of metaphysical entities. Obviously influenced by Schopenhauer, Gide substituted symbols for emotions, a hidden "Absolute" for an identifiable God. (Le Voyage d'Urien) (1)

This proved a poor solution, as Urien found out. The purely aesthetic, like the purely spiritual, would no longer satisfy Gide. Life meant action, and Gide must have a set of rules which permitted heroic individualism, and which covered both spheres, art as well as ethics. Years later he identified "le grand grief contre les Symbolistes" as "leur manque de curiosité devant la vie ... La poésie devint pour eux un refuge, la seule échappatoire aux hideuses réalités ... quoi d'étonnant s'ils n'apportèrent pas une esthétique nouvelle ... mais seulement une esthétique." (2)

Gide's own path was set: "Sortir enfin du rêve et vivre d'une vie puissante et remplie." (3)

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1. Le Voyage d'Urien, O.C. I.

2. Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XIII, p. 37-38. Gide criticizes "l'Art pour l'Art" for the same reason in 1932: "elle ne devait sa faillite qu'à son refus d'englober les questions morales. Il ne tenait qu'à l'artiste me semblait-il, d'étendre sur elles également son empire." Letter to Henri Drain, 18 July, 1932. Quoted by Delay, vol. II, p. 650.

3. J. I, p. 35 (1893).

We have seen indications of an awakening of awareness in André Walter. Gide deliberately set out for Africa with the aim of exploring these possibilities and discovering his true self. This quest would be heroic in every way. Gide was abandoning his sheltered world of illusions to face the truth about himself, and to develop a way of life based on that truth. In keeping with his own concept of the hero's duty, the riches he would discover would be manifested by transposition into art.

Gide had always had a yearning for tropical, even-oriental countries. Dating perhaps from his early fascination for "~~A Thousand Nights and One Night~~", he had dreamed of Sinbad's voyages, of palm trees, sun-scorched deserts and a free, vagabond way of life. His trip to Algeria in 1893 more than fulfilled his expectations. He left France with Paul Laurens in October of that year aboard the Argo. "L'élite de la Grèce ne frémissait point d'un plus solennel enthousiasme." (1)

This visit to Algeria was to liberate Gide from the major spectres in his life. His initial sexual encounters, with Meriem and Athman, coincided with his first open defiance of his mother. (2) There was no longer the

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1. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 348

2. Ibid., p. 376-79

slightest doubt. His infamous encounters with Wilde on his subsequent return to Africa were merely the first overt admission of those tendencies. Wilde's influence, like that of others in different areas, was "Plutôt une autorisation qu'un éveil." (1)

This sexual liberation corresponded with an overall breaking away from the old heroic ideal. The strict religious values were discarded; in fact, all forms of transcendentalism were looked upon as a hindrance to life. Gide, in Les Nourritures terrestres, also negates any form of "enracinement", not only possessions and material comforts, but opinions, binding affections and the desire for spiritual repos. Gide claims that "Dans le bien-être s'étoile toute vertu; les routes neuves, ardues, la nécessitent". (2) "Ce dont nous avons besoin, ce n'est pas de confort (et j'entends: du confort de l'esprit) c'est d'héroïsme." (3)

This violent negation of the old values is accompanied by an ecstatic affirmation of life, sensuality, risk, independence and energy. "J'aime tout ce qui met l'homme en demeure, ou de périr ou d'être grand." (4)

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1. J. I, p. 781 (1924)

2. Letter to Barrès, undated, quoted in Davet, Autour des Nourritures terrestres, p. 218.

3. Nouveaux Prétextes, p. 222.

4. Letter to Barrès, quoted in Davet, op. cit. p. 218

The most important value for the new way of life was sincerity. Gide would no longer settle for a life lived according to principles which were more or less randomly imposed by the fact that he was born in such a place, of such parents and such a religion. He must break with the past and find something more basic, more intimately related to the only thing which mattered - his own individual existence and destiny.

The very landscape of Blidah and Biskra reflect this emotional rejuvenation. "Les eucalyptus délivrés, laissaient tomber leur vieille écorce; elle pendait, protection usée, comme un habit que le soleil rend inutile, comme ma vieille morale qui ne valait que pour l'hiver." (1)

Les Nourritures terrestres, while it can hardly be claimed to "present a heroic ideal", does celebrate a particular way of life. And this way of life is the one which Gide, while he was writing the work, considered the best or ideal way to live; in other words, the heroic way to live. The ideas of the work are heroic, too, in that they are, at least for their creator, new, vigorous, radical and individualistic. Above all they required effort, courage and determination. "Redécouvrir au-dessous l'être factice, l'être naïf, n'était point tâche

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1. Les Nourritures terrestres, O.C. II, p. 105

si facile; et cette règle de vie nouvelle qui devenait la mienne: agir selon la plus grande sincérité, impliquait une résolution, une perspicacité, un effort ou toute ma volonté se bandait." (1)

But Gide had learned the lessons of André Walter very well; the new philosophy was subject to its own dictum, "passer outre". And again, the parts of this new way of life which Gide later rejects may prove the most valuable considerations in discussing the development of his concept of heroism.

Gide had nothing but criticism for those who would consider the philosophy of Les Nourritures terrestres as definitive, "comme si l'éthique des Nourritures avait été celle même de toute ma vie." (2) "Je prétendais ne pas m'arrêter à ce livre." (3)

Like André Walter, (and indeed, like most of Gide's works), Les Nourritures terrestres carries its own built-in critique. Proclaiming his ecstatic attainment of a perfect disponibilité, Gide tells us: "Mon âme était l'auberge ouverte au carrefour; ce qui voulait entrer, entraient ... je me suis fait ductile, à l'amiable, disponible par tous mes sens, attentif, écouteur jusqu'à n'avoir

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1. Feuillets, 1923. J.I., p. 776.

2. Preface of 1927 to Les Nourritures terrestres, O.C. II, p. 228.

3. Ibid, p. 228.

plus une pensée personnelle, capteur de toute émotion en passage, et de réaction si minime que je ne tenais plus rien pour mal plutôt que de protester devant rien." (1)

This example, along with many other similar ones, clearly identifies one major danger of the work. In renouncing thought and memory, surely one is renouncing one's individuality rather than accentuating it. This should apply even more strongly to the case of renouncing judgment and denying the responsibility of choice. A certain amount of such extreme disponibilité is necessary for art, but, as always, Gide imposes a limit. Earlier he had described as a "faculté vraiment extraordinaire" of the poet "la permission qu'il a de s'abandonner aux choses, quand il le veut, sans se perdre." (2) But the reservations soon followed. "Si l'on n'absorbe tout, l'on s'y perd tout entier. Il faut que l'esprit soit plus grand que le monde, qu'il le contienne; ou bien il s'y dissout piteusement et n'est plus même original." (3) Although Gide made these claims long before writing Les Nourritures terrestres, there seems little doubt that in the first flush of enthusiasm for his "nouvel être", the limit was not only disregarded but considered part of the old code which must be rejected.

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1. Les Nourritures terrestres, O.C. II, p. 115

2. J. I, p. 32 (1892)

3. J. I, p. 43 (1893). Gide associates this idea with the "don de dédoublement" thus suggesting that even while abandoning one part of yourself, you must be able to stand aside and view that abandonment with a certain objectivity.

Resignation of the self was desirable; Gide invokes "un Apollon inconnu": "prends-moi tout entier... Je t'appartiens. Je t'obéis. Je m'abandonne." (1) Later Gide's practical reason prevailed, and he realized the impossibility of any valid self-development through such a credo.

Recognizing as he did both the heroic, vitalizing aspects and the potential dangers of the philosophy of life presented in Les Nourritures terrestres, Gide went on to explore the ramifications of this work from different points of view in a number of his next writings.

The most important in this regard is Saül, which gives us perhaps Gide's most complete anti-hero, and as such, says a great deal about what the hero should, and should not, be. Although Saül wasn't published until 1903, it was being written around the same time as Les Nourritures terrestres. (2) Expressing his reservations about Les Nourritures in 1927, Gide claims that "le danger même que

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1. This tendency to abdicate one's personality and lose oneself in the totality may be a remnant of Gide's earlier mysticism. He carries it far enough in Les Nourritures terrestres for some sections to resemble the deliberate escape into nature of Rousseau's Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire, e.g. "Abandon à l'oubli des vagues, volupté du renoncement; être une chose. (O.C.II, p. 188)
  2. Gide and Valéry discussed the completed play Saül, "the sequel and negation of Les Nourritures", in their letters of October, 1898. ("Self-Portraits: the Gide-Valéry Correspondance", p. 201 - 03)



présentait sa doctrine m'est si nettement apparu, que, sitôt après, en antidote, j'ai écrit Saül dont le sujet même est l'exposé de cette ruine de l'âme, de cette déchéance et évanouissement de la personnalité qu'entraîne la non-résistance aux blandices." (1)

Saul, like the narrator of Les Nourritures terrestres, demonstrates an extreme sensitivity to the sensory world.

"Le moindre bruit, le moindre parfum me réclame." (2)

He is the king of a country under siege, yet his only conflict is with himself. He denies the responsibilities of his power and obeys only his impulses. In the play, Saul's temptations are exteriorized as demons to show this conflict in dramatic form, and Saul welcomes them. "Ce qui te meurtrit est accueilli par toi," observes the witch of Endor, warning him, "Clos ta porte ... ferme tes yeux! Tout ce qui t'est charmant t'est hostile ... Délivre-toi! (3)

The search for heroic individuality, without effort and restraint, can only lead to dispersion and anarchy.

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1. Letter to Victor Poucel, 27 November, 1927. (O.C. XIV, p. 407) In another letter, this time to the pastor Ferrari, he adds, "La dissolution de la personnalité ou menait une disposition trop passive à l'accueil est le sujet même de mon Saül ... que j'écrivis sitôt après mes Nourritures en manière d'antidote ou de contrepoids." (15 March, 1928; O.C. XV p.532)

2. Saul, O.C. II, p. 249.

3. Ibid, p. 345.

At the end of the play, Saül, half-mad, is surrounded by demons, all of whom he has voluntarily let into the tent. "J'aurais peur, si je refuse à un seul ma demeure, que ce ne soit au plus charmant - ou peut-être au plus misérable." (1) Nothing remains of the king's personality; he is a chaos of vices and desires: "Vous ne me laissez plus assez de place. Je suis complètement supprimé." (2)

L'Immoraliste portrays the same idea, but in a much subtler way. Michel's motives are both admirable and heroic. He wants to be free from the restraint imposed by traditions and habits, and, through experience, find his true self. He is willing to make the most difficult sacrifices to gain this end. He would substitute for the herd ideal an ideal of individualism based on what is most unique in him. Carried to a certain point this liberation could have provided a full and happy life. Michel realized this when that point came, "je me construisais une éthique qui devenait une science de la parfaite utilisation de soi par une intelligente contrainte." (3) But he didn't stop there to employ this "intelligente contrainte." He could no longer impose a moral discipline

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1. Saül, O.C. II, p. 402 (We are reminded that one of the minor themes of Les Nourritures is the hesitation to make choices for the same reasons.)

2. Ibid, p. 405

3. L'Immoraliste, O.C. IV, p. 76. There will be a fuller discussion on this point in the next chapter.

himself, and as a result, he became infatuated with the peculiarities of his inner self - with the strangest elements among the many possibilities which his new self offered. (1)

The philosophy of Les Nourritures terrestres taught the individual freedom, but not how to benefit from or use that freedom. Michel claims with Saül, "je souffre de cette liberté sans emploi", (2) Theseus, who could be considered a mature and fully heroic Michel, recognized this danger, and guarded against it by developing a strong will along with his radical individualism. "Il est un temps de libérer les hommes ... puis un temps d'occuper leur liberté, de mener à profit et à fleur leur aisance. Et cela ne se pouvait sans discipline." (3)

Le Roi Candaule again shows the dangers of refusing to impose limits on a good thing. In Candaule's case it is no longer excessive disponibilité, or over-indulgence towards oneself, but over-indulgence towards other.

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1. Michel's listlessness and lack of will power at the end of the work, and his admission that he is "fatigué de mon crime" (O.C. IV, p. 169) remind us of the bitter words which Gide would put in the mouth of the Prodigal Son: "Rien n'est plus fatigant que de réaliser sa dissemblance." (O.C. V, p. 16)
  2. L'Immoraliste, O.C. IV, p. 169. A young disciple of Gide's met this problem in the practice of the philosophy presented in Les Nourritures terrestres. In 1946 he wrote to Gide, "Je me suis libéré. Cela ne suffit pas. Libéré pour quoi?" (J.II, p. 294)
  3. Thésée, R.R.S., p. 1448.

"pas par politique, ni par sottise, mais...par une sorte de générosité indécise." (1) Much less common than the former, but not thereby, claims Gide, (2) less natural, this type of dissolution of the self through hospitality was clearly identified by Nietzsche as "the danger of dangers for superior and rich souls who spend themselves lavishly, almost indifferently, and exaggerate the virtue of generosity into a vice. One must know how to conserve oneself - this in the best test of independence." (3)

Candaule is perhaps the most complex of the "héros manqués" issuing from Les Nourritures terrestres. He is also the most heroic; his failing is, like Alissa's, an excess of one element of heroism without the counterbalancing effect of certain others. In a recently discovered letter, Gide criticizes some actor's portrayal of Candaule's role, ("un lunatique, un libidineux voyeur" etc.) and claims that Candaule ought to be portrayed as noble. "Il doit être admirable - à la façon du Timon (au 1er Acte) de Shakespeare dont il est descendu tout droit, je l'avoue."

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1. Le Roi Candaule, O.C. III, p. 309. The connection between these apparently opposite tendencies - selfishness and generosity - is easier to see when we consider Gide's descriptions of the former as "déplorablement dispos à l'accueil" (Saül, p. 345) In both cases there seems to be a subconscious attempt to get rid of the personality, by surrendering it either to others or to one's own demons.
  2. Ibid, Preface, p. 295
  3. Nietzsche, Jenseits von Gut und Böse, sect 41; Werke, vol. II, p. 604

In the words of Timon's steward "Bounty that makes gods does still mar men." (1)

Along with Michel, Saül, and Candaule who illustrate the weaknesses of Les Nourritures terrestres, Gide gives us at the same period two outstanding examples of its strengths. The second of these, Philoctète, brings us at last to the fully developed Gidean hero.

We have shown the tentative movement of Gide's thinking towards his heroic ideal. Even at thirteen, his spirit "était constamment tendu vers un Mieux." Having accepted, then partially rejected two heroic "ideals" in André Walter and Les Nourritures terrestres, Gide finally synthesizes the essence of both and of his future thinking on the subject. At last heroic virtue becomes definable no longer in terms of "devoir", "les dieux" etc. as André Walter proposed, or even in terms of the self as Michel tried to claim, but as "ce que l'on entreprend au-dessus de ses forces." (2) Virtue lies in the very striving after an ideal, which may be preconceived or vague, which requires

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1. "Timon of Athens", Act. IV, sc. ii, l. 41. Gide made this statement in a letter to Haguenin, dated 23 October, 1907. (Quoted by Claude Martin in Gide 1907, ou Galatée s'apprivoise, Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France, March-April, 1970.) Gide read Timon in May and June of 1893. (Cahier de lectures). In Shakespeare's play, Timon realizes his failure and claims "unwisely, not ignobly have I given". (II, ii, 171) This theme and the Banquet Scene which begins both plays are very similar, and references to the hero by the guests are interchangeable from one work to the other.

2. Philoctète, O.C. III, p. 58.

a great deal of effort and suffering; and which is often, if not always, unattainable. This concept represents the same basic "but choisi" to which Gide proclaimed that the hero is "volontairement et fatalement dévoué jusqu'à la damnation" in his very first definition of heroism.

While this idea of dedication to "something beyond" is hardly new in discussions of the heroic, Gide gave it new vitality and a new treatment in art. Taken as it is generally understood, Gide discusses the trait in relation to famous men and recognized heroes like Beethoven, Nietzsche and Napoleon: "Ces grandes et altières figures furent admirablement dévouées à quelque grande idée projetée devant eux, au-dessus d'eux." (1) But, colored by his own distinctive interpretation, the idea takes on a new complexity: "Que l'homme ne trouve point sa fin en lui-même mais se subordonne et sacrifie à je ne sais quoi qui le domine et vit de lui... Je n'aime pas l'homme, j'aime ce qui le dévore... C'est la source de tout héroïsme." (2)

This concept of heroism, best illustrated in the characters of Philoctète and, later, of Oedipe and Thésée, is the main theme of the important ironical work, Le Prométhée mal enchaîné, which appeared almost simultaneously

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1. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p.226

2. Gide's Preface to Vol de Nuit, Préfaces, Gallimard, p. 58

with Philoctète.

Before examining this very unusual treatment of the theme, we might note that, like most other aspects of his aesthetics, Gide's irony is closely related to his ethics, in this case particularly to his heroic ethics.

In a letter written in 1899, Gide discusses the reasons for the sudden appearance in his latest works of irony. "Elle est venue en moi, irrésistiblement, quand, peu à peu j'ai dû me rendre compte, m'avouer que ni les hommes ni moi-même n'étaient si beaux, ni si forts, ni si nobles que je me les étais figurés d'après mes premiers enthousiasmes... Il me semble encore, et je crois passionnément que l'homme aurait pu être, pourrait être, plus et mieux qu'il n'est. - De là mon ironie." (1)

Even though irony is normally cynical and detached and therefore the opposite of fervour, it can, as Jean Hytier points out, "supposer la ferveur. Elle est de la ferveur retournée." (2) Such would seem to be the case with Gide. An instinctively heroic and exalted view of man proved illusory; he is thus forced to

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1. Letter to Arthur Fontaine, 17 July, 1899, quoted in Davet, Autour des Nourritures terrestres, p. 220-21. Gide continues, "Si c'est contre moi-même que je la tourne le plus volontiers, c'est que c'est en moi-même que je vois le mieux tout cela."

2. Hytier, Jean: André Gide, Paris, Charlot, 1946, p. 91

"s'orienter un peu différemment"; (1) to detach himself, and thus avoid the pain and perhaps sterility that involvement in spite of this realization might entail.

The satire of Prometheus conceals a difficult and complex moral which forms an integral part of Gide's thinking on heroism. Prometheus has an eagle, his "trait distinctif... que n'a personne d'autre." (2) Therefore, according to Gide's earlier dictums, this eagle is his most worthwhile and interesting feature. (3) The eagle causes Prometheus great suffering since it literally eats his liver. Leaving aside the implications of this legendary gift-affliction for humanity, let us consider the eagle in terms of Prometheus' own predicament.

According to Prometheus, one must have an eagle, and, indeed, everyone has one whether vice or virtue, duty or passion. They may be petty and accidental, like those of Cocles and Damocles, or "plus glorieux". (4) Each individual must decide for himself how to treat his eagle - "le nourrir... l'étouffer, l'apprivoiser peut-être?" (5)

In relation to man, the eagle is that "quelque chose

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1. Letter to Fontaine, Davet, p. 220
  2. Le Prométhée mal enchaîné, O.C. III, p. 117
  3. Paludes, O.C. I, p. 415
  4. Le Prométhée, p. 138
  5. Ibid, p. 120



qui le domine et qui vit de lui." We can assume then, that it is a good thing; in fact, the essence of heroism. How does Prometheus' treatment of his eagle fit into this scheme?

First, let us note that the eagle is not consistent, and its representative value changes with its form. If we remain detached from our eagle, and view it as an affliction, "il restera gris, misérable, invisible à tous et surnois; c'est lui qu'alors on appellera conscience, indigne des tourments qu'il cause; sans beauté." (1) If, on the other hand, we love our eagle, it will become an asset. "Il faut aimer son aigle, l'aimer pour qu'il devienne beau." In other words, our eagle may be the voice of an authoritarian conscience (like Gide's early, puritanical conscience), which is a hindrance and should be eliminated. But the eagle can also represent an ideal; not a nagging, restrictive conscience, but a cause to which one can willingly, lovingly devote oneself. Thus force is replaced by renunciation in the ideal man-eagle relationship. This would seem to be a very reasonable interpretation in light of Gide's theory that "le bonheur

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1. Le Prométhée mal enchaîné, O.C. III, p. 138. The suggestion that the eagle represents man's conscience is supported by the fact that it only appeared after Prometheus had given man awareness or conscience, and as a result "en croyant devenu responsable". (p 134)

de l'homme n'est pas dans la liberté mais dans l'acceptation d'un devoir." (1) And yet, in apparent paradox, Prometheus, who has reached just this ideal relationship, suddenly kills his eagle. If we have an eagle, and the best way to treat it is to love it and to sacrifice oneself to it, then why kill it? Prometheus would seem to be showing, as Helen Watson-Williams suggests "a most unheroic inconsistency." (2)

One explanation (though not, we feel, the main one) which deserves mention is reflected in the legendary myth of Prometheus, and more particularly in Goethe's treatment of it. From this poem Gide learned very early "que rien de grand ne fut tenté par l'homme qu'en révolte contre les dieux." (3) Zeus (le Miglionnaire) is utterly contemptuous of, and unconcerned with mankind. When Prometheus discovers that it is he who gives eagles, he knows he must intervene in such an absurd situation and kill his eagle as an act of rebellion. God, the ultimate ideal, doesn't justify the eagle; it may be possible that the eagle will justify itself. But at the conference the eagle refused to speak. "quand je l'interrogeais, il ne répondait pas." (4) Prometheus offers this as the

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1. Preface to Vol de Nuit, p. 57
  2. "André Gide and the Greek Myth", p. 55.
  3. Goethe, N.R.F., March, 1932, p. 375
  4. Promethee, p. 159

final justification of his act.

Another reason, and one which is becoming increasingly important to Gide at this stage, is the social implications of one's individuality or "maladie de valeur." Damocles died because of Prometheus' eagle. On realizing its dangers, Prometheus was led to question its advantages and weigh one against the other. "C'est grâce à sa mort qu'à présent j'ai tué mon aigle." (1)

Again we could see the eagle as symbolizing the dilemma of Saül or Michel. The search for individuality must lead eventually to the destruction of originality and the personality. "Il faut qu'il acroisse et que je diminue." (2) "Cessez d'être quelconque et vous n'y échapperez pas." (3)

There seems to be a parallel here between our conclusions regarding Gide's attitude towards Alissa's self-sacrifice in La Porte Etroite and that of Prometheus. Most of Gide's failures failed because of a lack of strength, of restraint and of will-power. In short, they failed because of a lack of heroism. Alissa also failed,

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1. Prométhée, p. 355 This comment could also be interpreted as referring to the original myth where the sacrifice of another (Hercules) results in Prometheus' freedom.
  2. Prométhée, p. 124
  3. Ibid, p. 138

but, it could be claimed, her failure was due to an excess of heroism, albeit mis-placed heroism, and as such is more deserving of our sympathy. Likewise in Le Prométhée, Gide shows us all the beauty and nobility inherent in devotion to an ideal for its own sake, and then suddenly reveals that we have been tricked. (1) The sacrifice cannot be justified - Prometheus realized this in time to destroy the old value and reconstruct his life. But are we really tricked in such devotion? From the point of view of wisdom and common sense, we are. "Il ne faut gâcher sa vie pour aucun but. Nous avons trop souvent été joués." (2) But from the point of view of heroism we feel that the answer is less obvious. Here, for the first time we see individual heroism in conflict with the whole. In killing his eagle, Prometheus doubly benefits humanity: firstly because, as a hero, he defies the selfish authoritarian ruler, Zeus, thus asserting the freedom of man; and secondly because he thus relinquishes his hero status or individuality which were powerful enough to harm others (like Damocles). "Nous sommes accablés

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1. This position is emphasized to the point of absurdity in the epilogue. Pasiphae, envying Leda's fate, imagines she sees the divine Zeus hidden in every animal. She expects the outcome of her union with the bull to be another Helen or Dioscuri, and when she gives birth to the minotaur, she refuses to believe that Zeus played any part. The moral appears to be that lofty ideals don't always work in the light of day.

2. Ainsi Soit-il, J. II, p. 1173.

par les esprits sublimes. Pour qu'un homme soit au-dessus de l'humanité, il en coûte trop cher à tous les autres." (1)

In our opinion, Gide neither condemns, nor wholly sanctions Prometheus' act. Thus begins the long debate between the individual and the collective, and the opposing values of assertion and abnegation. Even the link between these sets of values is not as straightforward as it might appear: Prometheus chooses the collective, yet he does so through assertion, while Philoctète will choose the individual through abnegation.

In Philoctète, Gide deliberately suppresses all irony. Philoctète himself is a true hero - an ideal man. Whereas Gide's attitude towards Prometheus' solution is ambiguous he is clearly in favour of that of Philoctète. The hero can say at the end of the play what Michel, Alissa and Saül couldn't: "Je suis heureux." And to further emphasize the worth of his sacrifice, Gide ends on a note of allegory: "les fleurs autour de lui percent la neige, et les oiseaux du ciel descendent le nourrir." (2)

Philoctète is again an exploration of one possibility presented in Les Nourritures terrestres. Even though

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1. Montesquieu, quoted by Gide, O.C. III, p. 227

2. Philoctète, O.C. III, p. 63

its philosophy appears to be starkly contrasted with the earlier work, we are reminded of Gide's claim that "les Nourritures terrestres" is "une apologie du dénuement." (1) This claim is supported by phrases such as "Ames jamais suffisamment dénuées pour être enfin suffisamment emplies d'amour." In the character of Philoctète, Gide puts this seedling in fertile ground and watches it flower.

Subtitled "le traité des trois morales", there are three distinct ethics presented. The first two are static: Ulysses' social ethic defines virtue as "calme ta passion, soumet tout au devoir, à la voix des dieux, l'ordre de la cité, l'offrande de nous à la Grèce." (2) The virtue of Néoptolemus consists in devotion to another, or hero worship: "C'est à toi, Philoctète, que je me dévoue." (3)

Before the arrival of his visitors, Philoctète had still conceived of virtue in terms of the gods. "Je ne veux empêcher aucun rayon de Zeus; qu'il me traverse comme un prisme.." (4) Néoptolemus claims that "les dieux

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1. Preface of 1927, O.C. II, p. 228

2. Philoctète, O.C. III, p. 25.

3. Ibid, p. 56

4. Philoctète, p. 38 We are reminded of Gide's frequent use of crystal and prism images to symbolize purity and authenticity of the self.

que je sers ne servent que la Grèce ... ils ne diffèrent pas de ma patrie." (1) Philoctète, who has discovered Ulysses' plot to use him to Greece's advantage, realizes that in freeing himself from Greece, he must free himself from its gods. What then would become of virtue?

"Il y a quelque chose au-dessus des dieux" (2)

"C'est pour moi que j'agis." (3) This is individualism at its most noble. Voluntary abnegation - the supreme sacrifice without hope of praise or gain other than through example. Here we are reminded of the relationship between the hero's duties of manifestation and martyrdom. Philoctète wants to teach Néoptolemus. Incapable of preaching (he can't put his definition of virtue into words) he does his teaching by example: "si je pouvais te montrer la vertu". (4) Yet in order to be perfect such virtue cannot expect any reward, not even that of influencing others. Philoctète is momentarily exalted by pride in his achievement. "Ulysses; je te veux contraindre à m'admirer. Ma vertu monte sur la tienne et tu te sens diminué. Exalte-toi, vertu de Philoctète! Satisfais-toi de ta beauté!" (5)

In fact, Philoctète did conquer Ulysses, and deeply

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1. Philoctète, O.C. III, p. 46-47.

2. Ibid, p. 46.

3. Ibid, p. 58.

4. Ibid, p. 48.

5. Ibid, p. 57.

affect Néoptolemus. But his sacrifice had to be purged of even this last residue of pride in order to be rendered completely "calme" and "heureux" at the end. He never knew about Ulysses' admission, and the "ivresse" soon disappears. "L'aurais-je déjà tout épuisée? L'orgueil qui me soutient chancelle et cède." (1) Even the hope of imparting his virtue to Néoptolemus grows dim. "Il n'entend plus." His virtue has only itself as justification and is thereby perfect.

Looking at the play from another point of view, it could be argued that Philoctète's virtue is purely personal. "A quoi sert la vertu solitaire?... elle s'exalait sans emploi." (2) His happiness at the end is dependent on maintaining his isolation: "Ils ne reviendront plus; ils n'ont plus d'arc à prendre... -je suis heureux." (3) According to this argument, Philoctète's heroism cannot survive within society and so is a "héroïsme manqué". It seems however, that Gide in including Ulysses' secret respect and admiration for Philoctète's views, and by adding the allegorical ending, leaves no doubt as to his full approval of this heroism.

The answer to the dilemma lies, we feel in the

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1. Philoctète, p. 58.

2. Ibid., p. 51

3. Ibid., p. 63



aesthetic nature of the play itself. Gide heavily emphasizes the isolated, un-worldly aspects of Philoctète's island. "Nous vivons comme hors de la nuit et du jour." (1) "Les oiseaux ... glacés comme ces régions supérieures de l'atmosphère." (2) Philoctète himself explains the relation between this isolation and the theme of the play. "Ce n'est que depuis que je suis loin des autres que je comprends ce qu'on appelle la vertu. L'homme qui vit parmi les autres est incapable, incapable, crois-moi, d'une action pure et vraiment désintéressée." (3) In order then to examine the nature of heroic virtue and beauty in its complete pristine purity, Gide demonstrates it in the person of a completely isolated individual. Philoctète's motives are pure because he had no reason to "paraître". "J'ai souci d'être seulement." And only he can embark on the search for true heroism. "J'ai cessé de souhaiter, sachant que je ne pouvais rien obtenir ... du dehors - mais beaucoup obtenir de moi-même; c'est depuis lors que je souhaite la vertu." (4)

Gide deliberately, we feel, removes his hero from society. He is of course aware that this virtue is not

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1. Philoctète, p. 18.

2. Ibid, p. 35.

3. Ibid, p. 31.

4. Ibid, p. 32.

possible in practice. He even suggests, as we saw earlier (1) that heroism is not possible in practice. He wants, in Philoctète, to experiment with a theory of perfection, which, although idealized and unreal is meant to be taken seriously. "J'ai tâché de supprimer toute ironie de Philoctète, et de prendre les hommes, non tels que je les vois, mais tels que je souhaitais les voir." (2)

But Gide would not remain in the pure realm of theory, for long, no matter how attractive to his "besoin d'héroïsme" such experiments might be. The important question of heroic freedom, in all its facets within the self, within society, and in the work of art had been raised, and it would never cease to be a major issue in Gide's thinking on the heroic.

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1. See p. 26 of this study
  2. Letter to Arthur Fontaine, 17 July, 1899, quoted in Davet, Autour des Nourritures Terrestres, p. 221

### Chapter III: The Hero as Symbol of Individual Freedom

"C'est en se perfectionnant soi-même qu'on rend le plus de service à l'humanité." (1) The assertion of freedom, however heroic, in the face of society is meaningless unless the hero has reached a stage of inner, personal freedom. Thus Gide considered the heroic development of the individual much more dependent on his own resources and potentialities than on the outside world. (2)

If we, like Gide, reject the notion of static or determined personalities, (3) and accept that man is his own creator, we must recognize the fact that this implies a duty on the part of the individual towards himself. The first part of this duty is to take stock of himself, to know himself; the second is to decide which aspects of that self need restraint or discipline, and which aspects need encouragement.

Both these aims are normally facilitated by the

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1. Feuillets, O.C. XIII, p. 444 (Undated, and not included in the Journal.)
  2. In Ainsi Soit-il, Gide urges the young to make the effort, to venture into unknown territory and to avoid easy conformity. It is their own personalities which will determine the degree of their freedom: "il ne tient qu'à eux." (J. II, p. 1181)
  3. Gide, of course accepted the determinism of natural inequality which forms the foundation for every theory of heroism. He also accepted a more general sort of determinism, but denied that it should have any effect on our lives. Feuillets, O.C. XIII, p. 432

projection of an end point or model; for without such a guideline how is one to decide what to favour and what to discard? We are assured of the value of such a process of character formation by most moralists. "It is best to seek self-knowledge by studying some ideal type of the moral life and endeavouring to follow in its path, rather than by a direct contemplation of one's own impulses and motives. The latter tendency nearly always paralyzes action and promotes egoism." (1)

Gide recognized the benefits of such an approach which he incorporated into the character of Robert. Robert justifies his way of life by claiming that the cult of sincerity leads to pluralism while obedience to duty holds the instincts in check and thus unifies the personality. (2) Gide also professes sincere admiration for those who follow this path of duty in real life. (3)

However, Robert's answer is too narrow and limiting for Gide's own personal brand of heroism. He would rather risk the very real dangers of inaction and egoism than

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1. Mackenzie, John S.: "A Manuel of Ethics", London, University Tutorial Press, 1910, p. 380. Subject at different times in his life to the penalties cited by Mackenzie for taking the solitary route, Gide portrays them in the early "banqueroutes d'héroïsme" among his characters. However, the most evident example of these dangers of excessive self-analysis is found in Gide's interpretation of Dostoevsky's "Underground Man", where "nous verrons toutes les faces de cette idée, celui qui pense n'agit point." (Dostoievsky, O.C. XI, p. 272)
  2. Robert, R.R.S., p. 1342-43.
  3. Feuillets d'Automne, J. II, p. 311 (1947)

follow the strict guideline of a model. "Moi, je préfère fabriquer mon engin. découvrir ma cible." (1)

The greatest difficulty for Gide in accepting such guidelines, is that they prevent experimentation and novelty, and promote falsification of the personality; in a word, Bovarysme. First diagnosed by Gide in André Walter, he defines the term as "cette tendance qu'ont certains à doubler leur vie d'une existence imaginaire, à cesser d'être qui l'on est pour devenir qui l'on veut être." Gide continues "Chaque héros qui ne vit pas à l'abandon mais s'efforce vers un idéal, qui tend à se conformer à cet idéal, nous offre un exemple de ce dédoublement, de ce bovarysme." (2)

This pattern of heroism is not for Gide. Nor will he consent to becoming a model for others: "Vers quoi guiderais-je les autres? Moi qui ne sais pas où

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1. Cited by Robert Mallet: Une Mort Ambiguë; Paris, Gallimard, 1955, p. 97. Gide frequently reiterated this distrust of fixed goals. "Se diriger vers un but? Non, mais aller de l'avant!" (Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XIII, p. 59)
  2. Jules de Gaultier defines this term in his work "Bovarysme" as "the power given to man to see himself as other than what he is." (Trans. by G.M. Spring, N.Y., Philosophical Library, 1970), p. 4. Gide was familiar with this definition, which he refers to earlier in the quote. (Dostoievsky, O.C. XI, p. 225) He brings up the point again in the Journal of 1927, p. 869. Nietzsche joins Gide in questioning the value of goals. "Do not the best men who try and act according to a goal necessarily assume a somewhat exaggerated and distorted appearance on account of their excessive tension?" (Morgenröte, sect. 559. Werke, vol. I, p. 1274-75)

je vais?" (1)

The hero must, then, come to know himself through the difficult path of self-analysis and experience. All the instincts and potentialities of the self must be brought to the surface. None of Gide's subsequent reservations would refute the value of this initial emancipation. "Je ne crois nullement que le dernier mot de la sagesse soit de... laisser libre cours aux instincts; mais je crois qu'avant de chercher à réduire et à domestiquer ceux-ci, il importe de les bien comprendre." (2)

We saw how the adolescent Gide considered abnegation or restraint as the highest virtue. Even after his rejection of André Walter and his liberation, he couldn't dismiss this virtue along with the other aspects of his puritanism. In 1893 he wrote, "Je vis facilement. Il ne faut plus cela; il faut que tout dans la vie soit résolu, et la volonté perpétuellement tendue comme un muscle." Aware of the discrepancy which this statement would provide with his present credo to live freely and naturally, he adds, "Je ne regrette pourtant pas d'avoir, durant un an, changé de méthode; mais il faut toujours revenir à soi." (3)

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1. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 183
  2. Corydon, O.C. IX, p. 179-80
  3. J. I, p. 38 (1893)

The heroic quest for emancipation should not then be permitted to stifle any aspect of the true self. Gide learned very soon that one of the many instincts which demanded assertion was precisely the instinct towards self-restraint. "Je compris que la contrainte était chez moi plus naturelle que ne l'est chez d'autres l'abandon au plaisir, que je n'étais pas libre de ne pas vouloir, de me détendre et de cesser de résister; et je compris du même coup que, de cette absence de liberté précisément, venait la beauté de mes actes." (1)

Gide's own task was thus to arrive at a formula or way of life which would incorporate both his instinct towards freedom and his need for restraint. He succeeded in arriving at this formula while writing the series of works which followed and counteracted Les Nourritures terrestres. Saül and Michel clearly point the way: "Ce n'est que par la contrainte que l'homme arrive à ne pas se supprimer lui-

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1. Feuilletts, J. I, p. 105 (1901) It might be claimed that a criterion as personal as this natural instinct towards restraint should not be used in a proposal for a heroic way of life. However, this particular criterion would seem to be much more widely accepted as a natural element in strong and heroic personalities, than Gide realized at this time. As he became more secure in his literary tastes, he recognized the same admonition in many of his "heroic models". "Si le premier mot de la sagesse de Goethe est Entwicklung (développement), le second sera Entsagen (renoncement)." (Préface au Théâtre Complet de Goethe; Préfaces, p. 101) Nietzsche's aphorisms along these lines are very well known, and Dostoevsky, besides urging Christian abnegation, claims that renunciation is a part of assertion. "When you conquer yourself you will become free as you never thought possible." (Address at Pushkin's tomb.)

même." (1)

The "contrainte" Gide refers to here is, of course, self-imposed. He would never accept restraint imposed from without, at least not for the hero. (2) Even self-imposed restrictions are carefully examined for counterfeit values. Gide could not for instance, accept the popular dictum, "Be true to yourself", claiming that, 'de toutes les fidélités, celle à soi-même est la plus sotte ... fidèle à ses principes; on fait de cela sa personnalité.' (3) The freedom to "se contredire" is a primary one for the Gidean hero, and Gide criticizes the inclination of politicians and writers to become "fixed" by an early theory or style, "une affirmation prématurée", to which they then feel bound. (4) He himself can claim, "Il me plaît de servir; il ne me plaît point d'être esclave ... même de mon passé ... de mes projets d'avenir, de ma foi, de mon doute, ..." (5)

The hero, having freed himself from all artificialities, and having discovered through experience his inner potentialities is now in a position to exercise this self-restraint.

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1. J.I, p. 344 (1911)

2. "L'effrayant, c'est l'esclavage non consenti, impose; l'excellent, c'est celui qu'on s'impose." (J.I, p. 670)

3. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III p. 180-181.

4. Ibid, p. 179-80. Gide uses Barrès and Maeterlinck as examples of this failing.

5. J.I, p. 670 (1918).



There are several ways of approaching this task of character shaping. Firstly, the instincts which are seen to be dangerous to the integration of the personality must be restrained in some way; secondly, a balance must be sought between all the opposing instincts (not only those in the dangerous-beneficial dichotomy); and thirdly, the truly heroic self may then abdicate to some extent the freedom he has gained through the first two steps and carry self-restraint to its culmination in self-renunciation. This step leads to a superior stage of freedom, "la volupté à se désidentifier." (1)

We saw in Chapter II some examples of heroes who failed because of excessive freedom. Freedom itself is threatened by licence. Certain instincts such as pride, selfishness or excessive introversion can cause serious harm to the unity of the self, and the subject can become, as Byron feared, "the slave of his appetites", and the very opposite of heroic. (2) The process of control advocated by Gide involves first experiencing the passion in order to understand it, and afterwards restraining it by sublimating the energy and employing it in another, more

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1. J. I., p. 1230 (1935)

2. The most obvious example of this fate in Gide's work is, of course, Saul. Another more symbolic instance is that of Vincent in Les Faux-Monnayeurs.

constructive way. Both steps are necessary; those who cannot face the first are weak and mediocre, (1) while those who cannot pass beyond it to the second are the equally weak "ratés d'héroïsme" like Michel and Saül.

No instincts are to be suppressed, even those that appear most dangerous. "Pour moi, convaincu par l'expérience et par l'histoire que les forces les plus utiles sont celles qui se montrent les plus redoutables d'abord, et d'autre part, assuré de l'empire de mon esprit, je n'eus garde de rejeter rien de ce que je prétendais domestiquer et dont je restais assuré de pouvoir tirer bon parti." (2)

The Christian method of control through extirpation of the passions is weak and unheroic, concluding as it must, that "only the castrated man is a good man." (3) Rather, destructive urges must be sublimated into other channels, so that, in Gide's words, "les éléments troubles de l'esprit, ce seront demain les meilleurs." (4) Reminiscent of Freud's theories, this idea of sublimation is put into practical use on the sports field where warrior instincts are sublimated into those of rivalry. The essence of the instinct is the

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1. "Ceux qui n'ayant pas suffisant pouvoir de soumettre, repoussent, avant même de les connaître, les éléments anarchiques de leur être." (Un Esprit non Prévenu, p. 35)

2. Ibid, p. 35

3. Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht, sect. 383. (Stuttgart, Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1964) p. 261. It is evident that this idea of Gide's is very much influenced by Nietzsche.

4. Un Esprit non Prévenu, p. 35-36

underlying energy; only the objective of that energy is changed. In this way the original impulse is not cancelled or even subdued, but merely sublimated. Nietzsche claims that, "We can act as the gardeners of our impulses, and - which few people know - we can cultivate the seeds of anger, pity, vanity, or excessive brooding, and make these things fecund and productive, just as we can train a beautiful plant to grow along trellis-work." (1)

Nietzsche's definition of "giving style to one's character" explains exactly Gide's unformulated doctrine of self-development on the heroic plane. Strengths and weaknesses are explored and enhanced, or sublimated; thus true heroes (and Nietzsche, too, uses Goethe as the best example), "discipline themselves into wholeness, create themselves...become free and find happiness in constraint and perfection under a law of their own." (2) "For such men there is no longer anything forbidden unless it be weakness, whether called vice or virtue." (3)

The question may be raised as to whether by "giving style to one's character" in this deliberate fashion, we are defeating our original premise, which calls for the

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1. Nietzsche: Morgenröte, sect. 560. Werke, vol. I, p. 1275. Compare this with Gide's discussion of "les bourgeois que nous portons en nous" and their fruition in art with Jean Hytier, André Gide, p. 171-72.

2. Der Fröliche Wissenschaft, sect. 290. Werke, vol. II, p. 168

3. Götzendämmerung, sect. 49. Werke, vol. II, p. 1025

hero to act according to his nature. The process of self-restraint, when it involves the intellectual selection of those instincts which are to be fostered and those which are to be subdued would seem to be contrary to Gide's most basic thinking on heroic action, which would now seem to be dependent on reason or intellectual choice.

Praising the Greeks, who alone possessed the art of "bien vivre", Gide locates the secret of this art in "l'acte inconsideré." "Les Grecs agissaient tout nettement, selon le conseil de leur pente, de leur passion bonne ou mauvaise, de leur vertu, de leur orgueil ou de leur fantaisie", in other words, "selon la dictée de leur plus profond caractère." "Il ne leur arrivait jamais de peser longuement, entre plusieurs propos celui que la raison reconnaîtra pour préférable, ainsi que constamment il nous arrive de faire aujourd'hui." Gide concludes by repeating a dictum which he had formulated forty years earlier during the crisis of 1893: "L'instinct est le plus souvent meilleur guide que la raison." (1)

Yet Gide had always been in many ways an intellectual. He admits that even during his first emancipation, "les revendications de ma chair ne savaient se passer de l'assentiment de mon esprit." (2) He admires Dostoevsky's

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1. Un Esprit non Prévenu, p. 84-87

2. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 347

abdication of the will and the intelligence - the two factors which lead man to pride and damnation, but he cannot accept such a solution as heroic. (1) In fact, the characters Gide most admires in the Russian's works are precisely those who are damned by "la rumination du cerveau": Raskolnikov, Stavroguine, Ivan Karamazov, the Underground Man, etc.

Again Gide reconciles these opposing tendencies by recognizing both. (2) "L'illogisme irrite. Trop de logique ennue..." (3) The true hero shouldn't allow himself to be guided by reason, but nor can Gide accept the notion of an anti-intellectual hero. "L'homme qui se dit heureux, et qui pense, celui-là sera appelé vraiment fort." (4)

We have seen the method which Gide proposes as a means for the hero to shape his character in terms of his weaknesses and strengths. We may now consider his handling of the hero's complexity as a whole, that is, all the opposing drives that he feels latent within him.

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1. Dostoievsky, O.C. XI, p. 347
  2. The same conclusion is reached in philosophical terms by Axel Stern in his brilliant treatise on "The Science of Freedom", (trans. by C. and R. Strachan, London, Longmans, 1944). "Reason can only be free if it opens its eyes to both the Id and the outside world...the opposing energies then balance and the action can be truly said to be free." p. 47
  3. J. I, p. 840
  4. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, R.R.S., p. 270

The fact that Gide refused to eliminate destructive impulses, preferring instead to domesticate them is of considerable importance when we consider the other instincts that were revealed by his initial emancipation.

In Les Nourritures terrestres, Gide learned to combine hedonism,<sup>2</sup> which allowed him to indulge in the senses, with nomadism, which enabled him to escape their thrall. One without the other would result in servitude, not freedom; the hero would then become a slave of the senses, like Saül, or, alternatively, a victim of disponibilité like Ménalque. True freedom consists in the self-imposed balance between the two opposing tendencies or impulses.

The lesson would never be forgotten. Gide proceeded to enlarge this idea into a veritable doctrine of complexity or ambivalence as a prerequisite for heroism. Describing this as "mon système ...que je laisse lentement et naturellement se former," he explains his method. "Je laisse sans violence les propositions les plus antagonistes de ma nature peu à peu s'accorder." (1)

Once again the tendency at the root of this system is

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1. J. I, p. 842 (1927). This is one of the few times that Gide consented to call one of his ideas a "system". He consistently rejected systems, doctrines and philosophies, claiming that "Toute théorie n'est bonne qu'à condition de s'en servir pour passer outre." (J. I, p. 666) He associates the greatness of Dostoevsky (ibid) and Nietzsche (J. I, p. 346) with their refusal to formulate a system.

inherent in Gide's character. "Je n'ai jamais rien su renoncer; et protégeant en moi à la fois le meilleur et le pire, c'est en écartelé que j'ai vécu. Mais comment expliquer que cette cohabitation en moi des extrêmes n'amenât point tant d'inquiétude et de souffrance, qu'une intensification pathétique du sentiment de l'existence, de la vie...cet état de dialogue, loin d'aboutir à la stérilité... aboutissait à l'équilibre et précédait immédiatement la création." (1)

The inclination to "see both sides" of everything, even himself, and to attribute equal possibilities of value to each is probably related to Gide's homosexuality. Sexual ambivalence is commonly known to reflect (or inspire) other forms of ambivalence, both emotional and psychological. Alfred Adler, the founder of "Individual Psychology" claims that the most salient traits in the character of the homosexual are "inordinate ambition and extraordinarily pronounced caution." Each of these traits tends to negate and paralyze the other.

Gide, recognizing that "l'étincelle de vie ne saurait jaillir qu'entre deux pôles contraires", (2) identified at different times different terminologies for

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1. Feuillets, J. I, p. 777 (1923). "Supprimer en soi le dialogue, c'est proprement arrêter le développement de la vie." (J. I, p. 842 (1927). One of the leading modern psychologists, Carl Jung feels that "the natural state of the human psyche consists in a certain jostling together of its components, and in the contradictoriness of their behavior." (The Undiscovered Self, Boston, Little, 1958, p.61)
  2. J. I, p. 801 (1925)

those two poles in his own character, any of them interchangeable with Adler's ambition and caution. Perhaps the most significant of Gide's poles were "L'énergie et l'esprit critique - ces deux contraires". (1) On the one side we find the will-to-power, action and individuality; the urge for freedom, intensity, danger, novelty, immoderation, and risk. On the other side we find the opposing forces of the will-to-restraint, contemplation and reason; the urge for abnegation, order, form, discipline, modesty, moderation and security. (2) The path for the hero is to maintain both these sides in equilibrium, allowing first one to predominate, then the other, but never permitting one to reduce or overcome the other.

This "lutte" or "état de dialogue" is essential if man is to achieve truly heroic stature. Weak individuals, observing opposing tendencies within themselves try to eliminate some of those tendencies. In the words of Nietzsche, "Their most profound desire is that the war they are should come to an end. But when the opposition and war provide one more charm and incentive to life, - and

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1. J. I, p. 785 (1924)

2. Gide describes the same polarisation in Baudelaire as "la vaporisation et centralisation du moi." A "force de cohésion" is counterbalanced by a "force centrifuge et désagrégeante, par quoi l'individu tend à se diviser, à se dissocier, à se risquer, à se jouer, à se perdre." (Préface aux Fleurs du Mal, Préfaces, p. 15-16)



when in addition to these powerful and irreconcilable drives a real self-control has been inherited or cultivated too, (1) then those magical, incomprehensible and unfathomable ones arise, those enigmatic men predestined for victory and seduction whose most beautiful expression is found in Alcibiades, Caesar, and da Vinci." (2)

Nietzsche, then, feels that the maintenance of this war of opposing tendencies requires self-control. Gide agrees, citing abnegation as the key factor with regard to an individual's balanced complexity; only this factor will preserve "l'extraordinaire richesse d'antagonismes qui combattaient en lui." (3)

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1. Gide, "assuré de l'empire de mon esprit" feels himself in a position to maintain his irreconcilable drives. (p.79)
  2. It is interesting to note that Gide also considered this little known Greek, Alcibiades, a heroic figure. He was familiar with the Alcibiades portrayed in Shakespeare's "Timon of Athens" from 1893, but it was in Plutarch's "Lives" that he discovered a truly heroic Alcibiades, the beautiful youth who charmed and mocked his way through a riotous life of victories and heroism. (Plutarch, sect. 9) Aristophanes said of this character, "they long for him, they hate him, they cannot do without him." (Practically the same words are used by Dostoevsky to describe the reception of Stavroguine, another enigmatic hero who fascinated Gide. "The Devils," p. 56) In 1895 Gide, exasperated with his mother for refusing to let him bring Athman home to France called her "Une de ces personnes qui auraient empêché Alcibiades de couper la queue de son chien - ce que je trouve inqualifiable d'incompréhension." (Letter, 15 March, 1895, quoted by Delay, vol. II, p. 474) This incident is related only in Plutarch, so we may assume that Gide read him before he first mentions him in the Journal of December, 1905.
  3. Dostoevsky, O.C. XI, p. 186

Gide extends his theory of freedom through the balance of opposing forces beyond the scope of the individual psyche to the group or society (1) and even to the cultural tradition of a nation. "Il y a, il y aura toujours en France division et partis, c'est-à-dire, dialogue, grâce à quoi le bel équilibre de notre culture - équilibre dans la diversité." (2) Suppression of any one drive is bound to lead to the tyranny of another.

One of the consequences of this ambivalence is Gide's fascination for "la simultanéité des inconséquences, et de la dualité" (3) of both his own heroes and those of his main forerunner in this area, Dostoevsky. (4) Laura's description of Edouard reveals not a unified/self, but a Proteus; "son être se défait et se refait sans cesse; il prend la forme de ce qu'il aime." (5) Edouard attains a form of harmony in the same way as does Gide, through his art. In fact we are obliged to ask whether Gide offers any

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1. In Gide's unfinished play Ajax, Achilles and Ajax represent different aspects of society, "d'égale force, d'égal mérite, d'égal orgueil", who consequently "se balançaient... les exaltant l'une par l'autre." "Que l'un vienne à primer, il opprime; l'équilibre est rompu." (O.C. IV, p. 370-71)
  2. J. II, p. 191 (1943)
  3. Dostoevsky, O.C. XI, p. 225
  4. Jacques Rivière, in the N.R.F. (1 February, 1922, p. 175), claims that Dostoevsky was the first European novelist to emphasize self-will, bifurcation, the "acte gratuit", and the cohabitation of contradictory extremes within the self.
  5. Les Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XII, p. 292

other practical method of actually creating and maintaining an active "état de dialogue" other than through art. And yet this "état" is an essential feature of true heroism. Is Gide then saying that only artists can be heroic?

Perhaps the best example of the complex, "lay" hero is Lafcadio. (1) In the character of Lafcadio, Gide portrays a full range of contradictions and a corresponding control that reflects the best Nietzschean tradition. Lafcadio is capable of feeling almost at the same moment conflicting emotions such as love and hate: "Je me sens d'étreinte

assez large pour embrasser l'entière humanité, ou l'étrangler peut-être." (2) He could have kissed or choked the old woman, and helped or killed Fleurissoire. In this he remains heroic. He only loses his heroism when he chooses one option over the other. "L'équilibre est rompu." He also loses his freedom since his act is one of commitment, whether he likes it or not; "Je n'échapperais pas à moi-même... j'ai tué comme dans un rêve... Pourquoi me réveiller, si c'est pour me réveiller criminel?" (3)

It seems then that the maint

1. We might have used Theseus to illustrate this point, but since the city of Athens, his personal legacy, is evidently symbolic of the creative legacy of an artist, we can assume that his solution is based on the same catharsis of creation.
2. Les Caves du Vatican, O.C. VII, p. 327. Gide wrote in 1892, "Je vois toujours presque à la fois les deux faces de chaque idée, et l'émotion toujours chez moi se polarise." (J. I, p. 31) (See also J. I, p. 146, and his many discussions of this theme in Dostoïevsky, O.C. XI)
3. Les Caves, p. 401

dichotomy in the practical world of men is an almost super-human task. Yet, again, this is a basic premise of the whole concept of heroism. Gide can attain a certain measure of heroism in that he remains enigmatical and complex, yet avoids the plight of the modern anti-hero by relieving his tension and his "possibilités" in his art. The border between heroism and anti-heroism is thus very thin; had the Underground Man possessed, along with his complexities, "une réponse" to that famous question "Que peut l'homme?" he might have become, like Alexandre and da Vinci "un être supérieur" and a hero. "L'angoisse commence lorsque la question demeure sans réponse." (1) And, as we have seen, the only answers which Gide considers valid are action, and the work of art. (2) The hero who cannot maintain his ambivalence and manifest it through one of these channels soon becomes an anti-hero, and "breeds pestilence".

The question of action leads us into yet another aspect of the problem of freedom. Since Lafcadio can feel opposing emotions almost simultaneously, his response could be said to be arbitrary. Gide maintains that man's motives are infinitely more complex than psychologists are inclined

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1. Dostoevsky, O.C. XI, p. 268.

2. P. 45 of this study.

to think. "L'acte désintéressé" which is generally considered virtuous, noble and altruistic may be motivated by taste, while "ce que vous appelez les forces mauvaises ne sont pas toutes égocentriques." (1) "Les chimères les plus désossées aussi bien que les imaginations ou conceptions les plus sublimes, puissent parfois intéresser l'homme jusqu'à prendre le pas sur les intérêts vulgaires." (2)

Gide is leading up here to one of his most daring and controversial innovations in the psychology of freedom: "l'acte gratuit" which plays an interesting and important role in his concept of the heroic. It should be made quite clear that Gide doesn't mean by this term, an unmotivated action, "cela est essentiellement inadmissible". Rather, "les mots acte gratuit sont une étiquette provisoire qui m'a paru commode pour désigner les actes qui échappent aux explications psychologiques ordinaires, les gestes que ne détermine pas le simple intérêt personnel." (3) The motivation may then be hidden from the spectator, and even in some cases from the actor himself; it is rooted deep in the subconscious, not, as in the case of ordinary

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1. J. I, p. 835 (1927). Erich Fromm agrees with Gide in arguing against the theory of rational egoism, claiming that man may will things which have no effect on themselves. The Underground Man maintains that his only motivation is his own caprice, which may even contradict what reason tells him is to his self-interest. And Gide adds, "Je crois qu'en chaque circonstance j'ai pu discerner assez nettement le parti le plus avantageux que je pourrais prendre, et qui est bien rarement celui que j'ai pris." (Un Esprit non Prévenu, p. 30)

2. J. II, p. 344 (1911) 3. N.R.F., June, 1928, p. 841-42

actions, in exterior considerations.

In a sense then, a great many of the hero's actions will be "gratuits". The hero maintains himself in a state of ambivalence, always the master of his instincts, because the energy of one serves to counteract the force of another. The decision of which impulse he allows to prompt his action at any given moment is therefore somewhat arbitrary. This idea is very much in line with Gide's whole theory of freedom and action. Since action is, by its nature, committing, the freest action will be the one which is the least motivated by external or other factors which tend to increase that commitment. If the hero is always capable of choosing the opposite action, he is never bound or limited, even by his own motivation.

The culmination of this superior level of freedom is expressed by Dostoevsky's Kirilov, whose suicide Gide views as an "acte absolument gratuit". "Full freedom will come only when it makes no difference whether to live or to die." (1) Predicting the arrival of "a new man, happy, strong and proud", Kirilov claims that for this hero of the future, every choice, even that between life and death will be arbitrarily motivated.

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1. Dostoevsky: "The Devils", p. 125-26

The highest form of abnegation, and the most heroic use of self-restraint may result in the voluntary renunciation of freedom.

The virtue that Gide praises most highly throughout his life is abnegation, "le don de soi", and the joyful willingness to serve. "Le bonheur n'est pas dans la liberté, mais dans l'acceptation d'un devoir." (1) "Le paradoxe", adds Gide, "est de trouver cette vérité à l'extrémité de l'individualisme." (2)

There are two sides to this paradox. In the first place, expression is limited, not fostered by complete freedom. Some measure of restraint is necessary to prevent self-development from being reduced to egoism. "L'individu ne s'affirme plus que lorsqu'il s'oublie. Qui songe à soi s'empêche." (3) On the other hand, a fully developed individualism is a necessary prerequisite to true abnegation. Otherwise, "servitude volontaire" loses its conscious, active part and becomes blind, Christian obedience. A quote by Gide from Dostoevsky's correspondence offers a clearer explanation of this second point. "Le sacrifice volontaire, en pleine conscience, et libre de toute contrainte,

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1. J. I, p. 344 (1911)

2. Ibid; see also J. I, p. 674 (1920), and Gide's Preface to Vol de Nuit.

3. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, R.R.S., p. 261

le sacrifice de soi-même au profit de tous, est selon moi l'indice du plus grand développement de la personnalité, de sa supériorité, d'une possession parfaite de soi-même, du plus grand libre arbitre..." (1) Gide agrees with this assessment and concludes, "C'est dans l'abnégation que chaque affirmation s'achève." (2)

The degree of abnegation involved in both cases, that is, as both a point de départ, and the culmination of individualism, may differ considerably with different individuals. Gide himself, though he admired complete abnegation, was unwilling to accept any definitive "don de soi", and his periods of renunciation were never conclusive. "S'il me plaît de servir...et de me renoncer par amour, je veux que, librement consenti, le bail soit renouvelable à toute heure, et que la raison ou l'amour m'en dicte sans cesse les clauses à neuf." (3)

In his day-to-day life, Gide ensured this option by refusing to commit himself completely to any loyalty, and by reserving the right to be inconsistent. (4) In theory, he offers a much more dramatic solution, one which we have

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1. Dostofevsky, O.C. XI, p: 304
  2. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, P. 261
  3. Feuillets, 1919, J. I, p. 670
  4. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 180-81



seen in the the heroism of Philoctète and Prométhée. Oedipe, one of Gide's most heroic characters, brings the idea to fruition. This solution is the voluntary submission of the self, not to an outside cause, however worthy, but to that something that is both part of the self, yet beyond it, and "qui vit de lui". Oedipe claims that "le bonheur ne me fut pas donné; je l'ai conquis...j'y parviens en créant au-dessus de moi une sacrée puissance à laquelle ...je suis soumis." (1) Referring to the surhomme of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, Gide explains "L'humanité qu'il prétend surpasser, c'est la sienne." (2)

Another solution which Gide proposes in theory, but which is even less suitable to his personal way of life, is the complete abdication of individuality and originality. Situating Goethe in this "état supérieur, olympien," Gide adds, "il comprend qu'originalité limite; qu'en étant personnel, il n'est plus que quelqu'un... Il devient banal, supérieurement." (3) Goethe accomplishes this feat by abolishing all limits between himself and the

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1. Oedipe, Théâtre Complet, vol IV, p. 64.

2. Dostoevsky, O.C. XI, p. 288

3. J. I, p. 42 (1893). Mackenzie also uses Goethe as an example of the most highly developed type of hero, claiming that "a perfect character is one that is objective, that loses itself in the world with which it deals, one that knows much and loves much; not one that is much occupied in the contemplation of itself." "Manual of Ethics," p. 374-75

world, extending his spirit to encompass all of nature. Gide's carefully nurtured individualism made this route impossible. Discussing the oriental Nirvana he claimed in 1943, "A vrai dire je ne puis même parvenir à souhaiter vraiment...cette résorption qu'ils cherchent et obtiennent de l'individu dans l'Etre éternel. Je tiens éperdument à mes limites et répugne à l'évanouissement des contours que toute mon éducation prit à tâche de préciser..." (1)

Illustrating Gide's three levels of freedom, "banalité, originalité, olympien", (2) Cocles and Damocles were, before Zeus' acte gratuit, the epitome of banality. Their guideline was "ressembler au plus commun des hommes". Damocles later describes himself as "originel depuis trente jours" (the time of the event). "J'étais quelconque; je suis quelqu'un." (3) But in gaining this superior state of originality his life becomes completely determined by it. The third stage of "banalité supérieure" surpasses this limitation, and if we interpret the eagle as each man's originality, the attainment of that third stage may provide yet another motive for Prometheus having killed his. The greatest men are always the most human, "tandis que celui qui fuit l'humanité pour lui-même n'arrive qu'à devenir

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1. J. II, p. 254

2. J. I, p. 42 (1893)

3. Le Prométhée mal enchaîné, O.C. III, p. 308

particulier, bizarre, et défectueux." (1)

Perhaps the most common cause of counterfeit in Gide's portrayal of the heroic stems from this inability to escape beyond the stage of originality, and so become "défectueux" or "bizarre". The theme is exploited in particular in Les Faux-Monnayeurs where numerous characters make a veritable cult of "originalité à tout prix", a fact which is delightfully parodied by the littérateurs at the banquet of the Argonauts. (2)

We can accept fairly readily that this complete form of conscious or "transcendent" abnegation of the ego for a pagan unity with the universe or a Christian unity with God, represents some form of ultimate virtue in man.

We can even accept that it may be the apotheosis of heroism, at least the type of heroism presented by Mackenzie and the humanist tradition. But it is still difficult to locate

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1. Billets à Angèle, O.C. XI, p. 36-37. Gide applies this trait to writers who scorn influences fearing thereby to lose their own originality. He himself welcomes influences, claiming that "les époques fécondes ont été les plus profondément influencées." (De l'influence en littérature, O.C. III, p. 260-61). It is interesting to note that Freud uses just this excuse for avoiding Nietzsche. Recognizing that "his premonitions and insights often agree in the most amazing manner with the laborious results of psychoanalysis," Freud felt obliged to avoid him. "After all, I was less concerned about any priority than about the preservation of my openmindedness." (Gesammelte Werke, London, 1948. Vol. XIV, p. 86)
  2. With regard to the title of Gide's novel and this concept of counterfeit heroes, we might note that Carlyle said: "Heroes are all bank notes - all representing gold - and several of them are, alas, always counterfeit." (On Heroes, p. 11) In later chapters, he introduces false-popes, false-prophets, etc.

this stage at the end of Gide's particular brand of heroism, based as it is on individualism and vitality. Again Gide affirms the truth of this apparent paradox, and illustrates it from his own experience: "le triomphe de l'individualisme est dans le renoncement à l'individualité." (1)

We have shown that Gide believes that a high degree of self-development is necessary if the sacrifice is to be truly free. (Otherwise the subject may abnegate through ignorance of some other potentiality in his being, or according to the unconscious dictates of some external authority.) The abnegation itself thus serves, as Dostoevsky claimed, as an indication of a superior state of freedom.

But for this abnegation to serve also as the "triomphe de l'individualisme" we would expect some direct action on, or aggrandizement of the hero's total self-realisation in return for the abnegation of his ego and the disciplining of his passions. Such, claims Gide, is the case. In 1931 he wrote, "Je n'avais pas vingt ans que déjà m'apparaissait cette vérité consternante: que l'acte même du sacrifice grandit celui qui se sacrifie au point que son sacrifice est beaucoup plus coûteux à l'humanité que n'eût été la perte de ceux pour lesquels il se sacrifie." (2) "C'est

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1. Billets à Angèle, O.C. XI, p. 36

2. J. I, p. 1056 (1931)

dans son abnégation qu'est le secret de sa grandeur." (1)

Now we can see a possible connection between "banalité supérieure" and the individualistic, often anti-social concept of heroism that Gide has promulgated up to this point. Abnegation may be not only the triumph of individualism, but its paroxysm, just as Nietzsche claimed that the highest level of individuality was found in the ascetic who tortured himself as an extreme form of abnegation.

This interpretation of Gide's will-to-abnegation as a form of a Nietzschean will-to-power may not be extending his thought too far. We stated earlier that the third level of self-restraint, voluntary renunciation of freedom, was not a particularly Gidean trait: his admiration for this sacrifice was largely theoretical. At most times this was true. However, there were occasions, particularly during his early twenties when he was still inclined towards mysticism, and during his extreme old age when his energy and senses weakened, when Gide did experience this "banalité supérieure" to the full. An examination of one such experience will serve, we feel, to confirm our conclusions.

In the Feuillets preceding 1902, we read of a peculiar state of "ivresse légère" experienced in Italy, which produced "un transport délicieux":

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1. J. I., p. 1056 (1931)

"C'est à partir de lui [le transport] que commencent les héroïsmes. Je me sentais si glorieux que quelque douleur n'eut fait, je crois, que m'exalter encore davantage. Je présidais à tout, sur tout, mais c'était d'une manière impersonnelle; je m'oubliais, m'éperdais, dans une volupté imprécise, m'y dévouais absolument.

Il est permis que là tout l'individualisme triomphe, car tout égoïsme y finit. Certainement, en cet état, tout retour à moi, toute considération personnelle, devenait non seulement malséante, mais impossible; en cet état je me sentais tout aussi bien capable des plus nobles actions que des pires - capable de n'importe quelle action, dont mon esprit, comme stupéfié, ne pouvait mesurer, ni ne voulait calculer, les conséquences.

Et ma seule présence, partout, établissait entre tout ce que je voyais, entendais et sentais, une palpitante harmonie où finissait ma résistance. J'y vivais..." (1)

There is little doubt that this description reconciles Goethe's "état olympien" with Gide's individualistic heroism to produce a genuine apotheosis of freedom, abnegation and assertion. The experience incorporates personal exaltation; a suggestion of the volupté of Nietzsche's ascetic; a feeling of Goethean dominion over (the italics are Gide's) all of nature; an abdication of the self; the capability or potentiality for action (an important addition for Gide); the complete freedom of such action, since the subject has attained the heroic stage of arbitrary choice or

motivation; harmony, but a harmony that is "palpitante" rather than static; and finally, and most importantly for Gide, an intense sensation of life. Thus we come to the highest point of freedom that the self is capable of - an intensification of life and individuality attained through the renunciation of the self, not perhaps from the humanistic motives proposed by Mackenzie, but in accordance with Gide's own doctrine of self-mastery and individualism.

"C'est à partir de lui que commencent les héroïsmes." \*

#### Chapter IV: The Ethics of the Hero

A review of the great ethical systems of the past reveals that there are two main paths or methods that can provide the foundations for an ethics; such a system may be based on a metaphysical fact, usually an absolute moral "Good", or on a physical fact, such as the psychological make-up and situation of the individual human being.

A leading twentieth-century psychologist, Erich Fromm, describes the first of these systems, which states a priori what is good and imposes rules and norms of conduct that promote this good, as authoritarian. The norm-giver may be the religion, the society, or the immediate social group with whom the individual interacts; in each case "good" is defined in terms of a body exterior to any individual and deemed applicable to all. Virtue is then determined by the degree of conformity with this exterior body.

The second system of determining moral values, which Fromm terms "humanistic ethics" (1) is based on the human individual. The individual has "an enormously great significance" (2) and he is himself a "creator of values". (3)

By viewing ethics in this dualistic pattern, we hope

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1. Fromm, Erich: "Man for Himself, An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics." (N.Y.: Rinehart & Co., 1947)
  2. Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht, p.524.
  3. Nietzsche: Jenseits von Gut und Böse, sect.260. Werke, vol.II, p.730.



to facilitate the study and assessment of André Gide's ethical viewpoint. We will investigate the ethics of the Gidean hero under three categories. Firstly, the destructive aspect, or the rejection of old values which we can now roughly equate with "authoritarian ethics", secondly, the revaluation of the basis of ethical theory and the formulation of a new "humanistic ethics", and thirdly, the experimental extreme of this new ethics revealed in Gide's attraction for the hero as unfettered by moral or civil laws. Finally we will consider the main problem posed by the practice of this ethics - action, and its place in the life of the Gidean hero.

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### The rejection of old values.

Gide's description of his moral education reveals some startling similarities with Fromm's authoritarian ethics.

"Mes parents m'avaient habitué à agir non d'après la dictée de mon être, mais d'après une règle morale extérieure à moi et qu'ils estimaient applicable à tous les hommes..." (1)

In 1891 he was still very much a Puritan. Rejecting Schopenhauer's "morale tout empirique" which he claims is not really a morale at all, "mais une psychologie", Gide

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1. Pages Retrouvées, 1923. J. I, p.775.

claims that "une morale doit être à priori". (1)

And yet, less than three years later, Gide was claiming "Je ne veux plus comprendre une morale qui ne permette et n'enseigne pas le plus grand, le plus beau, le plus libre emploi et développement de nos forces." (2) This affirmation establishes the necessary link between ethics and the individual who is its main consideration. "Croire que l'humanité trouve un but en dehors d'elle-même et qui ne soit par elle-même projeté serait folie et course après son ombre. Le progrès de l'homme n'est qu'en lui-même ... " (3)

Thus Gide found, as most modern thinkers have, that it is the same psychologist whom he had rejected in Schopenhauer who comes closest to providing man with a workable ethic. Psychology must start from the human being and not from outside absolutes. Gide's new ethics would also preclude the metaphysical a prioris which he had earlier claimed as the basis of all morality. "Il n'y a pas de "loi morale" que le vrai psychologue doive et puisse admettre comme donnée." (4)

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1. Pages Retrouvées, 1923. J. I, p. 26.
  2. Ibid., p. 52 (1894). See also p. 380 and p. 831. Gide criticizes Martin du Gard for believing that "le fondement de toute morale ne peut être que religieux." (1927)
  3. Sur Quelques Points de Littérature et Morale, 1897. O.C. II, p. 420
  4. J.I, p. 680 (1920).

We have seen how Gide successfully emancipated himself from his own particular "authoritarian conscience." (1) The rigid mores of his Protestant religion, strict parental supervision, and sexual repression caused the same violent reaction that had been experienced earlier by two of his "heroic models" - Blake and Nietzsche. The encouragement and example of such models was especially necessary to him in the formulation of his thinking on ethics, since it is in this realm that he would appear most radical, and be most widely condemned. (2) Ascribing considerable credit to Goethe for his moral emancipation, (3) Gide explains the need for confirmation of his tendencies in a Journal entry concerning the influence of Nietzsche on his work. "C'est besoin de sympathie qui me fait rechercher avec une inquiétude passionnée l'appel ou le rappel de ma propre pensée en autrui, ... qui me fait enfin traduire Blake et présenter

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1. Fromm claims that there is a corresponding division of consciences: The authoritarian, "the voice of an internalized, external authority such as the parents or the State", and the humanistic, "the voice of our true selves" or "the reaction of our total personality to its proper functioning and disfunctioning." "Man for Himself", p.158-60.
  2. Gide was called a "corrupter of youth", "an obscene, irresponsible subversive whose false values ... are shocking to honest, devout, and good-thinking people." (L'Osservatore Romano, April 3, 1952, in an article defending the Pope's decision to put Gide's works on the Index.)
  3. Goethe N.R.F., March, 1932.

ma propre éthique à l'abri de celle de Dostoïevsky." (1)

Once having freed himself from the grip of authoritarian morality, Gide turned to a consideration of the ethical structure of society as a whole.

The moral code which Gide saw in operation around him was directly opposed to "le plus libre emploi et développement de nos forces." These old values, as we saw in the introduction, were based on the particular authorities of a culture and handed from generation to generation as the only truth. "Ce qui a été, c'est ce qui sera." (2) Instead of the development and perfection of the individual, this code fostered conformism, artificiality and hypocrisy; the self was not only forced into stagnation but obliged to assume a false personality in order to conform with the only accepted norms of behaviour and belief.

This Gide felt to be the single greatest disadvantage of the present society's "Morale de ruminant". (3) It destroys the authenticity of the individual, engendering artificial sentiments and counterfeit personalities. "La morale consiste

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1. J.I, p. 793 (1922) See also p.781 (1924), and p.859 (1927).
  2. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, R.R.S. p.292. Carl Jung describes the same situation in "The Undiscovered Self", p.59. "Where the many are, there is security, what the many believe must be true; what the many want must be worth striving for and necessary and good."
  3. Nietzsche's expression quoted by Gide, Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p.234.

à supplanter l'être naturel (le vieil homme) par un être factice préféré." (1) The individual is continually torn between what he is and what society expects him to be; between "être et paraître". "On s'occupe tant de paraître qu'on finit par ne plus savoir qui l'on est." (2)

Perhaps the most interesting example in Gide's work of this type of falsification is Félix Douviers in Les Faux Monnayeurs. The depiction of this minor character corresponds very closely to Gide's observations on Pavel Trusotsky (Dostoevsky's "Eternal Husband"). Trusotsky's conflicting emotions are caused, according to Gide by "la lutte du sentiment véritable et sincère contre le sentiment conventionnel".<sup>(3)</sup> Trusotsky tried to kill Veltchaninov, his wife's lover, because revenge was dictated by the prevailing social code, in spite of the fact that he felt an instinctive friendship and affection for him. Like Trusotsky, "un Douviers, pour

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1. J. I, p.30 (1892) In the Feuillets of 1923 (ibid. p. 775-777) Gide devotes a long discussion to "cette règle qui viole et contrefait leurs mouvements les plus sincères." (p. 776).
  2. Les Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XII, p. 291
  3. Dostoevsky, O.C. XI, p. 246.

devenir jaloux, doit se figurer qu'il doit l'être." (1)

Dissimulation and hypocrisy are pernicious even when they are motivated by the noblest instincts. Pauline Molinier's attempts to hide her husband's weaknesses from their children to preserve the facade of family life required by society cause her to lose their confidence and affection. Likewise, Robert's well-meaning but pretentious virtue awakens disgust in his wife and daughter.

"Oui, certes la convention est la grande pourvoyeuse de mensonge. Combien d'êtres ne contraint-on pas à jouer toute leur vie un personnage étrangement différent d'eux-mêmes...?" (2)

After identifying the evil effects, Gide turned to the sources. We will consider in a later chapter how, in

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1. Les Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XII, p. 473. Dostoevsky critics (Lavrin, Vickner) disagree with this rather unusual interpretation of Trusotsky's conduct, but Gide admits that this is only "une des façons d'envisager ce livre remarquable" (O.C. XI, p. 246). Light is shed on his personal interpretation when we consider what Gide, in this case, held as "l'émotion véritable". In 1905 he quoted Rousseau regarding his relationship with Mme. de Houdetot and Saint-Lambert. "Je n'ai jamais un moment regardé son amant comme mon rival, mais toujours comme mon ami. On dira que ce n'était encore là de l'amour; soit, mais c'était donc plus." Comparing the situation with that of Kuichkine in L'Idiot, Gide comments, "L'expression de ce sentiment (qui est aussi celui de mon Candaule) et que je n'ai rencontré que là, est de la plus haute importance". J. I, p.189.

2. O.C. XI, p. 249-50

his opinion, the Church contributed to this morality of stagnation and hypocrisy. Equally pernicious was the family unit. For Gide, true heroism must involve a complete emancipation from family ties. One of his most heroic works, Oedipe, which he considered subtitling "le triomphe de la morale" (1), incorporates this Gidean ideal. Oedipe is overjoyed to discover that he is a bastard. "Du temps que je me croyais fils de Polybe, je m'appliquais à singer ses vertus ... Maintenant, plus de passé, plus de modèle, rien sur quoi m'appuyer, tout à créer... à inventer et à découvrir." (2)

In the first place, the benefits the family traditionally offers are in themselves undesirable. Guidance from this source is more often harmful than helpful in the development of individuality. "Sur une quarantaine de familles que j'ai pu observer, je n'en connais peut-être pas quatre ou les

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1. J. I, p. 837. (1927)
  2. Oedipe, Théâtre Complet, vol. IV, p. 82. Gide offers Biblical sanction for his rejection of marriage and the family in the Journal (I, p.96) of 1896. The marked difference between Dostoevsky and Gide on this point is indicative of the fundamental division between the Christian traditionalism of the Russian and Gide's more revolutionary position. The homeless or bastard characters of Dostoevsky (Arkady, Smerdyakov, Lizaveta, Peter Verkovensky, etc.) are not only subversive, they are also weak and unheroic in themselves, while the heroic characters (Stavroguine, Raskolnikov and the Karamazovs) exhibit noticably strong family ties.

parents n'agissent point de telle sorte que rien ne serait plus souhaitable pour l'enfant que d'échapper à leur empire."(1) Parental example only succeeds in perpetrating the undesirable features of the parents (2); in stereotyping thinking and behaviour, and, in thwarting innate abilities (3). The security of family life is likewise scorned by Gide. "Rien n'est plus dangereux pour toi que ta famille, que ta chambre ...!"(4)

Like all material or spiritual comforts and shelters, the "régime cellulaire"(5) of the family invites stagnation and prevents growth. "La religion et la famille sont les deux pires ennemis du progrès." (6)

Gide also attacked other aspects of the social system, mainly those promoting racial inequality and unjust criminal laws. However, we are only concerned here with the formulation of a code of morality which would serve the hero, and in this context, the enemy is clearly situated in the intimate back-

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1. J. I, p. 718 (1921).
  2. O.C. X, p.481. Nietzsche agrees. Jenseits von Gut und Böse, Sec. 194: "Involuntarily parents turn children into something similar to themselves, and call that "education"."
  3. J. I, p. 1237 (1935).
  4. Les Nourritures terrestres, O.C. II, p. 48.
  5. Les Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XII, p. 168.
  6. J. I, p. 1066 (1931).



ground of the individual. "Le seul drame qui vraiment m'intéresse et que je voudrais toujours à nouveau relater, c'est le débat de tout être avec ce qui l'empêche d'être authentique... L'obstacle est le plus souvent en lui-même. Et tout le reste n'est qu'accident." (1)

Given then that society possesses many worn out values which endanger individuality, how far should the Gidean hero go in destroying them?

Gide's non-conformists belong to two generations: the older ones are maladjusted and restless, but they lack the boldness to translate this discontent into action. The younger ones possess all the necessary daring, but they often act too rashly. We can compare for instance the Prodigal Son and his younger brother; Eveline and Geneviève, ("Tu auras beau faire, ma pauvre maman, tu ne seras jamais qu'une honnête femme") (2); Marguerite Profitendieu and Bernard; or La Pérouse who cannot pull the trigger to end his misery and Boris, his grandson, who does.

In general, Gide's sympathies lie with these young

1. J. I, p. 995 (1930).

2. L'École des Femmes, R.R.S. p. 1298. Madame Profitendieu reproaches herself with the same words for having returned to her husband, Les Faux Monnayeurs, O.C. XI, p. 47.

révoltés. (1) We saw in Chapter III that the limitations on this destructive process, which are always present, are most obvious during and after the twenties when Gide's concept of heroism became somewhat modified by his acceptance of an increased social responsibility. Thus Lafcadio, perhaps the most iconoclastic of Gide's heroes, evolved into Bernard. (2) Bernard himself comes to regret his early rebellion when he sees that others have had to pay. "Je me prenais pour un révolté, un outlaw, qui foule aux pieds tout ce qui fait obstacle à son désir." (3) After his meeting with the angel (the noble, altruistic tendencies in his nature), he is "envahi d'un amoureux besoin de don, de sacrifice". (4).

Gide's general position as regards authoritarian ethics, then, sanctions destruction, as always, within limits. The individual must be freed from rules and regulations imposed from without for the betterment of some outside object or for the sake of the "average". Accused by Rouveyre

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1. Gide's rather ambiguous treatment of Geneviève is no doubt due partly to the fact that he cannot really accept women in a heroic role. "Les plus belles figures de femmes que j'ai connues sont résignées et je ne m'imagine même pas que puisse me plaire et n'éveille même en moi quelque pointe d'hostilité, le contentement d'une femme dont le bonheur ne comporte pas un peu de résignation." J. II, p.60-61 (1940). (This may also explain why his most sympathetic and successful female characters are Marceline and Pauline Molinier.)
  2. Journal des Faux Monnayeurs, and Pages du Journal de Lafcadio, O.C. XIII.
  3. Les Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XII, p. 287, also p. 491.
  4. Ibid., p. 485.

of "acidité décompositrice", and of hiding a subversive diabolism beneath "un manteau apparemment orthodoxe." (1)

Gide replies, "Action décomposante! Il'est vrai. Mais qu'est-ce que je décompose ici? qu'un composé factice, ruineux, de morale et de préjugés, où ne s'abrite que de la peur." (2)

It has been generally recognized that the more a theory lays claim to universal validity, the less capable it is of doing justice to the individual. Jung claims that "the only direct and concrete carrier of life is the individual personality, while society and the state are conventional ideas, and can claim reality only in so far as they are represented by a certain number of individuals." (3) For Gide, this is of the utmost importance. The hero can never accept a moral code geared to the average and claiming universality of application. "Je me persuadais que chaque être ou tout au moins, que chaque élu, avait à jouer un rôle sur la terre, le sien précisément et qui ne ressemblait à nul autre; de sorte que tout effort pour se soumettre à une règle commune devenait à mes yeux trahison." (4)

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1. Rouveyre, André: Le Reclus et le retors: Gourmont et Gide, (Paris, 1927), p. 139.

2. Letter to André Rouveyre, 31 October, 1924. O.C. XII, p. 559

3. Jung: "The Undiscovered Self", p. 75. Gide agrees: "Tout effort de désindividualisation au profit de la masse est en dernier ressort, funeste à la masse elle-même." J. I, p. 1232 (1935). For example Sparta had no great men because, "la perfection de la race empêcha l'exaltation de l'individu." (J. I, p. 98-99)

4. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 333

The individual thus becomes the focal point of ethical consideration; the ground is cleared for a new law.

### Formulation of a new heroic ethics

Gide not only attacked the traditional ethics of society, but questioned the very basis of ethics itself. After his break with the Puritanical flesh = evil; spirit = good dichotomy, Gide first attempted to discard all notion of good and evil as a basis for action. "Agir sans juger si l'action est bonne ou mauvaise. Aimer sans s'inquiéter si c'est le bien ou le mal." (1)

But Gide could not maintain this purely instinctive way of life for long. "Je n'acceptais point de vivre sans règles." (2) In a letter to Rouveyre in 1924 he relates this need for a moral law to his strict Huguenot upbringing. "L'horreur du défendu a précédé de longtemps le besoin de légitimer à mes propres yeux ma conduite et l'intime proposition de mon être. Et ceci est très important, car c'est précisément cette horreur du défendu qui m'a

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1. Les Nourritures terrestres, O.C. II, p.22.

2. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 346. See also J. I, p. 18 (1890) where Gide discusses the "Nécessité d'une morale".

contraint de reviser le code; je ne pouvais prendre mon parti, non plus de vivre insincèrement que de demeurer hors la loi."(1) Gide then must find a moral code which allows for the fullest and freest development of the individual without harming others.

It has been pointed out by many critics that Gide had a double conception of evil. (2) "Le Malin" or Satan is sometimes seen to reside in the will to selfishness, as in the excesses of Michel, Saül or the pastor. Again, it is situated in the intellect which can prevent action and the direct experiencing of life, (Urien and Paludes). "L'orgueil et l'ennui sont les deux plus authentiques produits de l'enfer." (3) In fact, Gide completely rejects everything that falsifies life and experience as "evil" - "Tout ce qui procure une griserie artificielle, tout ce qui frelate, déprave et vicie la nature, je m'en suis toujours farouchement

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1. Nov. 10, 1924, Correspondance, Gide - Rouveyre, (Mercure de France, 1967) p.88 (Gide's italics).
  2. Holdheim, William: Theory and Practice of the Novel, p. 74. Feyer, Harry Misha: Gide, Dostoevsky and Freedom, p.116 - 118. Thérive, André: M. André Gide et Satan, L'Opinion, 17 August, 1923. Peyre, Henri: Hommes et oeuvres du 20e siècle, p.116. Drain, Henri: Nietzsche et Gide, p.122.
  3. J. I, p. 841 (1927)

détourné." (1) He is thus far from condoning, as some detractors claim, experience of every genre regardless of the consequences. But Gide hastens to assure us in the same quotation that this rejection does not apply to those experiences or tendencies which he feels are an integral part of his nature. "Je ne puis consentir à appeler vice un penchant et des goûts qui m'étaient naturels." (2)

A second reason for Gide's rejection of certain aspects of the present good-evil system of morality is the fact that it inhibits change. God is invoked as an ally of the status quo, and any tendency to alter or destroy this hierarchy is automatically associated with subversion and evil. For Gide, this very same striving towards change and against conformism and stagnation is regarded as man's highest and most heroic good, born of his urge for freedom and progress and a fuller, richer life. This force, which may be called "evil" both in its call for change and in that it operates through the passions, is, in the new Gidean ethics "good"; a vital source of Promethean energy and the single most helpful element towards self-fulfillment, creativity and progress. "Je crois que, souvent le mal (certain mal

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1. J. I, p. 1222 (1935)

2. Ibid.

qui n'est pas le fait d'une simple carence, mais bien une manifestation d'énergie) est d'une plus grande vertu éducative et initiatrice - que ce que vous appelez le bien. Oui, je crois cela fermement et de plus en plus." (1)

This type of force, evil to the conservative, is very close to the "daimonism" resurrected by Goethe from the Greek idea of "daimon" as the source of the poet's inspiration (and often his madness as well). Stefan Zweig best defines the term. "The daimon is the incorporation of that tormenting leaven which impels our being (otherwise quiet and inert) towards danger, immoderation, ecstasy, renunciation and even self-destruction. Whatever strives to transcend the narrower boundaries of the self ... is the outcome of the daimonic constituent of our being." (2)

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1. J. I, p. 952-3 (1929); also p. 932, and O.C. XV, p. 232. Goethe made the same claim while defending Byron's "Satanism": "We must beware of seeking formative qualities only in what is decidedly pure and moral ... Everything that is great promotes culture." "Conversations with Eckermann", (trans. by John Oxenford, London, J.M. Dent, 1951) p. 286.
  2. Zweig, Stefan: "The Struggle With the Demon", from "Master Builders", II, p. 243. We do not of course suggest a direct influence here. Gide never refers to the term "Daimonism" as such, although he was acquainted with the "Conversations" from 1926 (J. p. 819). The same type of force is termed "heroic vitalism" by Eric Bentley ("A Century of Hero Worship") and used with regard to Nietzsche and Carlyle; and Holdheim speaks of Gide's "vitalistic ethics".

The same difference between this daimonism and what Gide accepts as evil ("le fait d'une simple carence") is illustrated by Goethe himself. When questioned by Eckermann as to whether Mephistopheles was, like Napoleon, a daimonic figure, Goethe answered "Never! Mephistopheles is much too negative a being. The Daimonic manifests itself as a thoroughly active power." (1)

This daimonic or humanistic ethic is perhaps the most easily recognizable trait of Gide's concept of heroism. The rejection of comfort and security which we will later see at work in the social context is coupled with a craving for the new, the different, the dangerous, the unknown and the exceptional. The reference point for this ethic is provided by the heroic ideal in itself as portrayed in the heroism of Philoctète; that "quelque chose qui dépassait en valeur la vie humaine." It is this principle which Zweig calls the "daimonic constituent of our being" and which gives man the courage to become a Rivière or a Prometheus.

We will examine the various aspects of this new ethic in turn: energy; joy; the urge towards the unknown and the dangerous; the superior joys of effort and search over those of completion and arrival; the taste for excesses and extremes; and the importance of the exceptional in human experience (i.e., mystical exaltation, suffering, déséquilibre

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1. Goethe: "Conversations with Eckermann," p. 327. Gide calls evil, "un principe positif, actif, entreprenant." (J. I, p.609, 1916.)



intérieure, and crime.) Some of these traits were of course exhibited by Gide himself and helped form what could be called the heroic part of his personality. They were often tempered however by such elements as natural restraint and a basic inability for action or commitment. Even those aspects of his heroic concept which remained theoretical with regard to his own life were amply portrayed by his fictional heroes, and, as such, deserve a prominent place in our investigation.

"L'Energie est la seule vie. L'Energie, c'est l'éternel délice." (1) This quotation from Blake sums up the importance of energy as the primary agent of heroic daimonism. Energy and affirmation are the opposite of resignation and submission; and yet it is these latter qualities which are traditionally held up as ideal virtues. "L'âme réclame l'héroïsme; mais notre société ne permet guère aujourd'hui qu'une seule forme d'héroïsme (si c'est de l'héroïsme encore) l'héroïsme de résignation, d'acceptation."

(2)

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1. Quoted by Gide, his own trans. O.C. XI, p. 279.
  2. L'Evolution du Théâtre, O.C. IV, p. 216. Claiming that modern society and "notre morale chrétienne" does its best to discourage individual development Gide compares this morale with the more heroic Greek tradition. "Il [le Christianisme] a placé le souverain bien dans l'humilité, dans l'abjection, dans le mépris des choses mondaines, tandis que l'autre le plaçait dans la grandeur d'âme, dans la force du corps; et dans ce qui rend audacieux les hommes." (Ibid., p. 212-13)

It is this dichotomy which led Blake to define Good as "the Passive that obeys Reason", and Evil "the Active that springs from Energy". (1)

Gide places considerable emphasis on joy throughout his work; there have been few books written in the history of literature as joyful as Les Nourritures terrestres.

Gide possessed a strong natural tendency towards joy which is evident in every phase of his development, a tendency which even his rigid puritan upbringing couldn't stifle.

"L'état de joie (que je voudrais toujours maintenir en moi) est celui qui m'est le plus naturel et aussi bien celui où je suis le plus tendu, où je me sens le plus de valeur." (2)

Again, he found support in the strong but often frenzied gaiety of Nietzsche, and the calmer, fuller joy of Goethe.

Perhaps most of all, however, he envied the simple country pleasure of the Arabs in Biskra or the shepherds in Vergil's Bucolics. (3) Recognizing the value of happiness as well.

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1. Blake: "Marriage of Heaven and Hell", p. 15.

2. J. I, p. 940 (1929). Gide explains this in terms of his optimism and his refusal to dwell on the past. Praising Nietzsche's reflections on "les bénéfices de l'oubli", he concludes, "que c'est à cela surtout que je dois mon extraordinaire disposition et propension au bonheur, à cette anti-historicité de mon esprit." J. II. p. 59 (1940).

3. It is from these pastoral hymns to joy that Gide takes the names of many of his most representative characters, Ménalque, Corydon, Amyntas, Mopsus, Galatée, etc. He read Les Bucoliques in 1891 (Cahier de Lectures).

as the difficulty of attaining it, Gide makes it one of the main virtues of his new ethics. "La joie devint pour moi non seulement un besoin naturel mais bien encore une obligation morale." (1)

We have seen evidence of Gide's fondness for the strange, the exotic, and the unknown. His fascination with Les Milles et une Nuits, with any form of mystery, and with the kaleidoscope (until he discovered how it worked), all demonstrate this eager curiosity in the young child. But Gide didn't outgrow this pleasure as most children do. When he was 35, he was still dreaming "au vaisseau de Simbad". "Je songe à la pleine mer dont parlait Nietzsche, à ces régions inexplorées de l'homme pleines de dangers neufs, de surprises pour l'héroïque navigateur." (2)

Even during that period when he was attracted by symbolist austerity and religious mysticism, Gide often escaped into this dream world. In June 1891 he wrote pages to Valéry describing in rapture the heroic Scandinavian myths where kings and warriors kill themselves rather than accept death other than on the battlefield. Gide, "la tête remplie de

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1. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, p. 270. Gide even went as far as to say "Je considère ce devoir d'être heureux plus haut et plus impérieux que ces factices devoirs d'artiste." J. I, p. 715.
  2. L'Evolution du Théâtre, p. 218; see also J. I, p. 675 where Gide condemns the French "qui ignorent la vertu des aventuriers", and seek happiness by means of "demeurer en repos, dans une chambre."

ces brutales et vénérables visions" (1) realizes that, however contrary to his present morale, the instincts aroused by these "réflexions et vagabondages" give him "une certaine braverie morale, un peu hargneuse, mais belle en somme, et la seule certainement capable de grandes choses." (2)

There is little doubt that Nietzsche was Gide's strongest reinforcement on this point. Many of his better known aphorisms from Zarathustra proclaim the same credo of "lever l'ancre". "Believe me, the secret of the greatest enjoyment of existence and of the greatest fruitfulness is: to live dangerously! Build your cities on Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves!" (3) One of the few regrets Gide expresses in Ainsi Soit-il is that he didn't allow "plus de temps à l'aventure" and to visit new places. "Je me console mal..."

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1. Correspondance, Gide-Valéry, p. 88-89. The letter is dated June 2, 1891.
  2. J. I, p. 19. Although Gide doesn't state the fact, the myths he describes to Valéry form a summary of the ones related by Carlyle in the first chapter of "Heroes", ("The Hero as Divinity"). Gide read this work shortly before, and the quote cited expresses his reaction to that particular chapter. It is also noteworthy that Gide's description of the tree of life (Tgadrisil) in Narcisse, which he was also writing at this time, corresponds very closely to Carlyle's description of the same tree, again in this chapter of "Heroes" (p. 18-19).
  3. Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft, sect. 283. Werke, vol. II, p. 166.

surtout d'avoir été si précautionneux - ce qui s'accorde si mal avec mon instinctif mépris du confort." (1)

"C'est dans l'attente qu'est la vie." (2) This conviction expressed in Les Cahiers d'André Walter is one of the few of this period that remained with Gide throughout his life. Gide relates in 1928 an early episode of his life, a pilgrimage to La Grande Chartreuse, when he resisted at the last moment entering the Church he had so long dreamed of visiting. "Sur le point d'atteindre mon but, je tournai bride et repartis soulé d'une satisfaction différente et comme enrichi de cette privation." (3) Gide describes the working of this process in Les Nouvelles Nourritures: "Il n'y avait point là renoncement, mais une expectation si parfaite de ce que cette félicité pouvait être, une anticipation si accompli, que la réalisation ne pourrait plus en rien m'instruire, qu'il n'y avait déjà plus qu'à passer outre ..." (4)

Perfection or attainment are not ideals, but hindrances in that they destroy motivation and heroic struggle. "L'idée

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1. Ainsi Soit-il, J. II, p. 1181
  2. O.C., I. p. 106.
  3. J. I, p. 891 (1928).
  4. R.R.S., p. 281.

de perfection exclut celle de progrès." (1) Gratification on both the social and the individual level must lead to a falling off of effort, energy and élan. It is by means of voluntary abstention that desire is made to transcend its object, for it is the desire itself which is valuable. (2) Goethe claimed that "we are never so far removed from our desires as when we imagine that we possess that which we desire." (3)

In the same way, a task or challenge is valuable for its intrinsic difficulty. Easy success, like gratified desire is weak and unheroic in that it contains no potential for further striving. As Spinoza warns us, "All noble things are as difficult as they are rare."

A further attribute of Gide's heroic vitalism is a taste for extremes. "Hérétique entre les hérétiques, toujours m'attirèrent les opinions écartées, les extrêmes

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1. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 93. Alissa's preference for "rapprochement infini" rather than complete but static happiness with God prevented her salvation but is in itself heroic.
  2. This idea, which we discussed in the last chapter, is the basis of Freud's Sublimation Theory, wherein sexual instincts are sublimated into life instincts or "Eros". See in particular Marcuse's "Eros and Civilization", Chap. 10, and also Bertrand Russell's "Human Society in Ethics and Politics." Chapter 7.
  3. "Maxims and Reflections", "Great Writings of Goethe" (Mentor, 1958) p. 275.

détours de pensées, les divergences." (1) The extremes praised by Gide fall into two categories; emotional extremes and physical or sensual excesses. While contemporaries such as Oscar Wilde extended a similar taste for extremity to all facets of life (conversation, mannerisms, dress, art or philosophy), (2) Gide deliberately rejected all extravagances outside these two realms.

In spite of the apparent contradiction with what we have seen of Gide's call for restraint, he was never able to accept emotional temperance as a heroic virtue. His rejection of "les tièdes" in Numquid et tu, and his exuberant praise of extreme emotional responses in Les Nourritures terrestres are two of the more obvious examples of this tendency. His taste for sensual excess is amply portrayed in Si le grain ne meurt. "J'ai souvent éprouvé combien il m'était vain de chercher à me modérer, malgré ce que me conseillait la raison la prudence." (3)

This tendency, although it might appear to be a very minor part of Gide's daimonic ethics, cannot be confined either to the realm of sensations or the early period of the

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1. Les Nourritures terrestres, p. 21.

2. J. I., p. 847 (1927).

3. Si le grain, O.C. X, p. 59.

1890's. In 1910 for instance Gide claims that "ce qui signalera le mieux notre époque" in art as well as attitudes, is the tendency to "faire habiter l'idée de perfection, le souhait, non plus dans l'équilibre et la mesure, mais dans l'extrême ou la surenchère." (1) (Although Gide again found strong support for his idea in Nietzsche, he also associates it with Dostoevsky, again linking it with energy. "Au fond ce que chérit Stavroguine, c'est l'énergie ... Le chemin de l'excès mène au palais de la sagesse." (2) )

Even around 1916 during his religious "crisis" when Gide's values tended to modify somewhat, he could not accept excess as evil. "Je prenais pour bon tout ce qui était réglé. Par la mesure je croyais maîtriser le mal; et c'est par cette mesure au contraire qu'il prenait possession de moi." (3)

Linked with this taste for extremes is Gide's well-

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1. J. I, p. 310. (1910). Contemporary thinkers, particularly in England, tended to disagree with this assessment. T. S. Eliot, for instance, condemned this emphasis on strong emotions and extremities of all sorts as decadent. "After Strange Gods", N.Y., Harcourt, 1934, p. 53-55.
  2. Dostoïevsky, O.C. XI, p. 278. Dostoevsky himself admitted in a letter to a friend "my nature is too passionate and unrestrained. I always go to extremes; I have exceeded the limit all my life." Dostoevsky to Maikov, quoted by Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, trans by Donald Attwater, N.Y., Sheed and Ward, 1943, p. 20.
  3. J. I, p. 561 (1916).



known predilection for the exceptional and the original in both men and situations. "Chaque esprit ne m'intéressait que par ce qui le faisait différer des autres." (1) His novels deal almost exclusively with exceptional characters - usually intelligent, lucid and much given to self-analysis, they spend most of their time struggling with their wills, and have little acquaintance with the work-a-day world of jobs, poverty, responsibilities and daily life. And yet, Gide feels that it is in these exceptional circumstances that the essence of humanity is most clearly visible.

The idea that the most deeply human can be found not in the average, but in the exceptional is not a new one. Schopenhauer says, "The Idea of Man has the peculiarity of expressing itself in highly individual characters." (2) Kierkegaard saw the obsession with extremity and the exceptional in literature as ultimately more realistic than the cultivation of the norm. (3) And Dostoevsky claims that, "That which the majority call fantastic and exceptional, is for me the very essence of reality." (4)

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1. Les Nourritures terrestres, O.C. II, p. 21
  2. Schopenhauer: "The World as Will and Idea", 3 vols, trans. by R.B.Haldane and J.Kemp, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950. Vol. I, p. 326
  3. Kierkegaard: "Fear and Trembling", trans. by R. Payne, Oxford University Press, 1946, p. 82-85
  4. Dostoevsky: "Correspondence", trans. by D. Magarshack, London, Lehmann, 1954. Letter to N. Strakhov, 10 March (p.121)

Marcel Arland admits the validity of these claims, but feels that Gide goes to far. "Si Gide peint des êtres exceptionnels, c'est d'abord pour montrer ce qu'ils ont de profondément humain; mais il arrive que bientôt ce soit par goût du monstrueux." (1) Such criticism echoes our findings with regard to Corydon's "bizarrerie", and may contain an element of truth. However, Gide can claim that he never meant to represent reality or to portray a model for the average man to follow. "... je répondrai à votre blâme que je n'ai pas proposé mon personnage en exemple." (2) In fact, he calls for an ever greater distance between theory and real life, and between the hero and the average, urging dramatists to "écarter de la réalité la fiction, et du manteau des mœurs le héros." (3)

The Gidean hero is a daimonic individual living in exceptional circumstances which demand a far greater "tension of consciousness" than is common. One of Dostoevsky's leading critics, Janko Lavrin, claims that

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1. Arland, Marcel: Essais Critiques, (Paris, Gallimard, 1931) p. 99-100
  2. See R. Maillet: Une Mort Ambiguë, Paris, Gallimard, 1955, p. 95.
  3. \*Gide: L'Evolution du Théâtre, O.C. IV, p. 127.

the three main paths leading to this "tension of consciousness" are the mystical experience, suffering, and crime. (1) Gide was well acquainted with the first of these, the mystical experience, from his early adolescence, but his first move in the formation of his new ethics was to reject any form of transcendentalism as a source of vitality.

The other two sources cited by Lavrin, would remain with Gide as exceptional or heroic situations having considerable importance in the formation of the great man. Without them, or at least, without their potentiality, true heroism is not possible. "...un individu ne peut prendre conscience de son âme qu'en plongeant dans la souffrance et dans l'abîme du péché." (2)

To some critics, Gide's work is notable for the absence of suffering or pain. And it is true that it is not until Oedipe that Gide introduces suffering as a virtue. (3) But there is one aspect of suffering that

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1. Lavrin: "Dostoevsky", N.Y., Russell and Russell, 1947, p. 42.
  2. Walter Rathenau, to Gide, Dostoevsky, O.C. XI, p. 281 (Gide's italics). See also J. I, p. 713 (1921). Nietzsche also speaks of the "tension of the soul" which is beneficial and "dependent on suffering and misfortune which communicate to the soul their energy." (Jenseits von Gut und Böse, sect. 225. Werke, vol. II, p. 689)
  3. "Je ne sais quoi d'héroïque et de surhumain me tourmente, Je voudrais inventer je ne sais quelle nouvelle douleur qui étonnerait les dieux." (Oedipe, Théâtre Complet, vol. IV, p. 105)

he was firmly convinced constituted an essential condition of greatness. This was some form of physical or mental handicap; it is by overcoming this handicap that greatness develops. (1)

There seem to be two benefits to be gleaned by the hero from such a disease or handicap. The first lies in the increased power and energy required and produced to overcome the obstacle. This power can then be sublimated and expressed by artistic creation or by an ethical emancipation which allows the individual to propose new values to humanity.

Nietzsche explains the connection between art and suffering. "It does not seem possible to be an artist and not to be sick. Those who have never faced suffering do not need to produce beauty and greater strength to overcome it." (2) Gide is just as categorical with regard to the second connection, that between great moral reformers and sickness: "...je ne sache pas qu'on puisse en trouver un seul, de ceux qui proposèrent à l'humanité de nouvelles évaluations, en qui...ils ne puissent découvrir...ce qu'ils

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1. "Cessez de regarder la maladie comme un manque... Je préfère que vous regardiez la santé comme un manque de maladies." (Paludes, O.C. II, p. 22)
  2. Nietzsche: Der Fall Wagner, sect. 5. Werke, vol. II, p. 913. Gide's own handicap or "tare" is obviously his homosexuality. Even though he argues that it is natural, he realizes that it is the main thing which sets him apart from others, and the cause which he must be strong to defend.

appelleront peut-être une tare - que je veux simplement appeler: une provocation." (1) Gide then goes on to explain the process. "Il est naturel que toute grande réforme morale, ce que Nietzsche appellerait toute transmutation de valeurs, soit due à un déséquilibre physiologique.

Dans le bien-être, la pensée se repose, et, tant que l'état de choses la satisfait, la pensée ne peut se proposer de le changer." (2)

Thomas Mann also sees this as a key factor in the formation of greatness. He describes both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche as "inmates of Hell, devout and diseased," and claims that "certain attainments of the soul and the intellect are impossible without disease, without insanity, without spiritual crime." He describes the great invalids as victims sacrificed to the more sublime health of succeeding generations. His comment that, "Thanks to the madness of these victims, we no longer need to be mad", echoes an earlier one of Gide's. "Naturellement on peut penser ensuite comme ceux-ci sans être déséquilibré soi-même." (3)

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1. Feuillets, J. I, p. 666 (1918) See also ibid. p. 98, p. 998, and O.C. XI, p. 294

2. Ibid. p. 665

3. Ibid. Mann's comments are from his introduction to "The Short Novels of Dostoevsky", which he wrote around 1945 when he was an acquaintance of Gide's. He may have been familiar with the latter's ideas on this subject, which were published in Incidences in 1924, and in Billets à Angèle, as early as 1900.

The second advantage of suffering is that it causes man to experience life more acutely. "Sickness is a stimulant of life," claims Nietzsche. (1) "Whatever depth, mystery, disguise, spirit or greatness has been bestowed upon the soul - has it not been bestowed through suffering?" (2) Gide strongly supported this theory which he saw illustrated in the lives of many of the great men he admired. Dostoevsky was an epileptic; Nietzsche, Blake, and Rousseau suffered from varying degrees of madness, and so on. (3) He recognizes the same sentiment in the works of a young contemporary, Charles-Louis Philippe: "C'est la joie, c'est l'exaltation de cette sauvage santé des souffrants et des malades, c'est cette santé supérieure, conquise, reconquise que déjà lui enseignait Nietzsche." (4)

The other exceptional situation leading to an increase of consciousness or vitality is crime or péché, which leads us into the next section of our consideration of Gide's heroic ethics.

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1. Nietzsche: Der Fall Wagner, sect. 5. Werke, vol. II, p. 913
  2. Nietzsche: Jenseits von Gut und Böse, sect. 225. Werke, vol. II, p. 689
  3. De l'Utilité de la Maladie, J. I, p. 99. In Billets à Angèle, Gide quotes his translation of Faust's reply to Chiron: "Guéri! je ne veux pas l'être! Mon esprit est puissant! Je serais alors abject comme les autres." O.C., III, p. 240
  4. O.C. VI, p. 152-53

The experimental extreme: the hero beyond all laws

Thus far in our examination of Gide's re-valuated ethics, the conditions he imposes for heroic individuality are in opposition to traditional morality in the narrowest, Christian value structure. This opposition arises from the scepticism and the will to change in itself, and from the passion or energy which underlie the new morality.

In general, Gide restricts his heroic ideal to this form of daimonism.. "The daimon is not a friendly or helpful power unless we can hold him in leash...to assist us on our upward path." (1) Gide's well known admonition "Il est bon de suivre sa pente, pourvu que ce soit en montant," echoes Zweig's caution.

It cannot be denied, however, that Gide, with his taste for immoderation and danger was to a certain extent fascinated by the frankly immoral hero who disregarded not only the conservative values of family and religion, but also the general human values of right and wrong as they are defined by both civic and moral laws.

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1. Zweig: op cit.

Both truth and morality are relative to a given culture at a given time, and must therefore be willing to change with the times. Ibsen's Dr. Stockmann says that the majority is never right, for this reason. "Once a truth has become old, it is also on the way to becoming a lie...nevertheless it is only at this stage that the majority makes its acquaintance." (1) The same thought prompted Kierkegaard to say that "The crowd is untruth", and Nietzsche to claim repeatedly that "All that is good has at one time been new, and consequently strange, anti-moral and immoral... The great epochs of our life come when we gain the courage to rebaptize what we regard as evil in us and call it good." (2) Even moral philosophers recognize this fact. Mackenzie claims that "many of the acts that we regard as vices were the virtues of a lower stage of civilization which has been superceded but in which some men still linger." (3)

1. Ibsen, Heinrich: An Enemy of the People, trans. by Max Faber, London, Heinemann, 1967, p. 81-82
2. Nietzsche: Menschliches, Unmenschliches, sect. 90. Werke, vol. I, p. 771. Zarathustra claims that "the Creator has first to be a destroyer and break value into pieces." (p. 128) This may have been one of the bonds between Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Blake and Browning which Gide had in mind when he called them "quatre étoiles de la même constellation" in 1922. (J. I, p. 729) It was around this time that he was translating Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and writing Dostoevsky. In the Feuillets of 1923 he quotes Browning: "Teeming growth, surprises of strange life/ Impossible before, a world broke up/ And re-made, order gained by law destroyed." (O.C.XIII, 425)
3. Mackenzie: Manual of Ethics, p. 393. See also Bertrand Russell, "Human Society in Ethics and Politics", Chap. VII



Gide carries this claim one step further. It doesn't require generations for an ethic or a law to outgrow itself or even to reverse; this can occur during the normal education of each individual. "Les lois et les morales sont essentiellement éducatrices, et par cela même provisoires... Toute éducation tend à se nier d'elle-même. Les lois et les morales sont pour l'état d'enfance: l'éducation est une émancipation. L'homme sage vit sans morale, selon sa sagesse. Nous devons essayer d'arriver à l'immoralité supérieure." (1) It is this superior state which is the natural one for the hero. Laws and morality must be surpassed, like every other limitation, if true heroism is to result.

Thus just as innovators possessed for Gide a physiological tare, so they were often guilty of a moral irregularity. Gide quotes Raskolnikov's statement, "tous les législateurs et les guides de l'humanité, tous sans exception, étaient des criminels, car en donnant de nouvelles lois, ils ont pour cela même violé les anciennes." (2) Raskolnikov goes on to sanction this kind of crime even

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1. J. I, p. 55 (1894)

2. Dostolevsky, O.C. XI, p. 270

if it involves murder, the extent being dependent on the degree of superiority of the hero and the future benefit to mankind of his idea, or vision. (1)

The idea has obvious attractions for Gide. The frequent occurrence of crime in his own novels, always perpetrated by strongly individualistic (and in this sense, heroic) characters like Michel, Lafcadio, Bernard, Protos, and Strouvihlou, is one example of this tendency. Another is his fascination for definitely immoral characters in history (Althalaric, Alcibiades, Nero), and his interest in real life crimes and their motives. (2)

In 1898, Gide attacked Stirner's rationalization of individuality claiming: "Il me plaît à Moi, l'unique, (3) que le "grand homme" continue à me paraître un grand coupable. Et...je dirai que je trouve lâche, Moi, de l'innocenter. Et quoi! pour disculper sa grandeur, rétablirez-vous donc la notion du bien et du mal?" (4)

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1. Dostoevsky: "Crime and Punishment", p. 276-77 (Penguin). As an example Raskolnikov uses Napoleon. "The real Master... storms Toulon, makes massacre in Paris, forgets an army in Egypt, wastes half a million men in the Moscow expedition,...and altars are set up to him after his death, and so all is permitted." (p. 291)
  2. Consider, for example, Gide's proposed Faits Divers of bizarre criminal cases, his essays on L'Affaire Redureau and La Séquestrée de Poitiers; his pleasure in such pursuits is openly admitted, see his letter to Arnold Bennett, O.C. X, p. 553 (1920) and his article in the N.R.F., June, 1928 (p. 840)
  3. Evidently a parody of Stirner's style, particularly in "The Ego and His Own", which is no doubt the work in question.
  4. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 226

Nietzsche, a prime influence on Gide at this time was even more emphatic on this point. "Terribleness belongs to greatness, let us not deceive ourselves. With every degree of a man's growth towards greatness and loftiness he also grows downwards into the depths and the terrible."

(1)

The interrelations of greatness and evil are discussed by George Santayana in writing about (though not condoning) the German Romantic conception of morality, an interpretation which Gide praised highly. (2) According to this view, good and evil enhance one another like light and shade in a picture; without evil there can be no good; so to diminish one is to undermine the other. "The greatest and most heroic man is thus he who not only does most good, but also most harm." (3)

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1/ Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht, sect. 1027, p. 674. Gide took up the same theme in 1901. "La grandeur du grand homme n'est pas seulement dans sa tête...tête et pieds sont du même homme; il y a de secrets rapports." (J.I, p. 97) Years later he gives us an example: "Racine ne mériterait pas tant d'honneurs s'il n'avait pas compris, tout aussi bien que Baudelaire, l'ineffable ressource qu'offrent à l'artiste les régions basses, sauvages, fiévreuses et non nettoyées d'un Oreste ou d'une Hermoine, d'une Phèdre ou d'un Bajazet - et que les hautes régions sont pauvres." (Nationalisme et Littérature, O.C. VI, p. 18).

2. J. I, p. 635 (1917).

3. Santayana: "The German Mind", N.Y., Crowell, 1968, p. 132. The comparison is interesting because of Gide's own frequent use of light, transparency, and shadows in moral connotations. Mackenzie, in his Manual of Ethics writes of "transparent goodness" and defines man's sins as the shadows of his virtues, claiming that "the strongest virtues will

It was probably Dostoevsky's criminal characters who most strongly stimulated Gide's taste for immoralism. We have seen how Raskolnikov "sanctions bloodshed by conscience", in the case of great men. In fact he denies the good-bad dichotomy altogether. Rather, "les hommes sont divisés en ordinaires et extraordinaires: les premiers doivent vivre dans l'obéissance, et n'ont pas le droit de violer la loi, attendu qu'ils sont des hommes ordinaires... L'homme extraordinaire a le droit d'autoriser sa conscience à franchir certains obstacles dans le cas seulement où l'exige la réalisation de son idée, laquelle peut être parfois utile à tout le genre humain." (1)

It was this courage to be the first to suggest a "transmutation de valeurs" that led Gide to call Dostoevsky, "a pre-Nietzsche-Nietzschean". (2) However, Gide clearly recognized the Russian's own personal position with regard

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 "...have the deepest shades". (p. 396) Gide describes his early purity and idealism in the same terms: "O cœur encombré de rayons! O cœur insoucieux des ombres qu'ils allaient projeter, ces rayons, de l'autre côté de ma chair." (*Si le grain*, O.C. X, p. 268) Goethe, or at least the mature "Classical" Goethe, objects to probing these shadows too deeply. "I discovered light in its purity and truth, and considered it my duty to fight for it. The opposite party did their utmost to darken light, for they maintain that shade is a part of light." ("Conversations with Eckermann", concerning Goethe's Theory of Colours.) This admonition becomes meaningful when we consider Gide's only criticism of Goethe: his "horreur de l'obscurité".

1. Dostoevsky, O.C. XI, p. 270-71
2. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 237-38

to these radical new values. "Si la question du surhomme est nettement posée par lui; si nous la voyons sournoisement reparaître dans chacun de ses livres, nous ne voyons triompher profondément que les vérités de l'Évangile." (1)

Gide's own personal position is somewhat harder to discern. He joins Nietzsche in cautioning against the transferral of the unlimited rights sometimes admissible in theory or for the truly heroic man, to every man.

"He who would dissect must kill, but only in order that we may know more, judge better, not in order that the world may dissect." (2) "Il faut que tout s'acharne contre le grand homme," adds Gide, "car il est l'ennemi de beaucoup."

(3) As the group of townspeople says to Oedipe, the hero: "Ton bonheur et notre malheur sont en quelque mystique façon solidaires." (4)

Yet Gide is just as adamant in protecting these rights in those exceptional circumstances. The true hero

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1. Dostoïevsky, O.C. XI, p. 281 Yet there is room for doubt; a veil of mystery about Dostoevsky that must add to his attractiveness for Gide. After all, he sometimes portrays characters like Orlov, the child-murderer in "The House of the Dead" who never repents or feels guilt. Lev Shetov makes a strong claim for this point of view, maintaining that Dostoevsky's real sympathies lay with the criminals. Marcel Drouin, Gide's closest friend, tends to agree. He points out that in spite of the proclaimed Christian precepts of moderation, resignation and mildness, it is the fiery, passionate heroes like Dimitri Karamazov, who, notwithstanding their sins and lack of faith, are saved, while others who are more virtuous and humble, but less passionate are lost. (Dostoïevsky, N.R.F., Aug. 1923)
  2. Nietzsche: Menschliches, Alzumenschliches, Werke, vol. I, p. 884
  3. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 227
  4. Oedipe, T.C., vol. IV, p. 66

must be free from the moral laws of the mass; which is one reason why the true hero cannot exist in fact, and must be preserved in fiction. "Lorsque un puissant créateur de caractères, comme Ibsen, étend sur les figures de son théâtre le triste manteau de nos mœurs, il condamne du même coup ses plus héroïques héros à la banqueroute." (1)

There can be no doubt then of Gide's sanction of certain immoral tendencies in certain cases. There are of course definite limitations, and these limitations increased as Gide grew older and more socially aware. . . But the attraction never entirely disappeared. The source of this attraction would seem to reside in Gide's natural inclination towards the daimonic elements we have seen: danger, difficulty, intensity, excess, etc. Crime probably provides a more immediate synthesis of these elements than any other human situation. "Only crime," claims Nietzsche, "raises man high enough for the lightning to strike." When asked "d'où vient cet étrange besoin de croire qu'il y a péril ou péché dans tout ce que vous allez entreprendre;" Gide replied, "c'est que j'ai le diable dans mon jeu". (2)

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1. L'Evolution du Théâtre, O.C. IV, p. 216

2. Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XIII, p. 79-80

The struggle between these tendencies and Gide's natural humanism is basically the same as the struggle we saw in the last chapter between instincts and restraint. And, as we might expect, Gide reached the same conclusion.

The heroism of Gide, like that of Nietzsche, employs passion as a necessary basis to be sublimated or transcended. Both condemn any ethics which preach an extirpation or "stamping out" of the passions. "Instead of employing the great sources of strength, those impetuous torrents of the soul that are so often dangerous and overwhelming, and economizing them, this most pernicious mode of thought wants to make them dry up." (1)

Both Nietzsche and Gide cite Caesar Borgia as a heroic figure (2) and both are condemned for it. The intention in both cases is to emphasize the potentiality or energy. "It is possible that modern man's failure to do evil arises from an inability to do evil. A man with strong impulses might be evil, but should he learn self control, he might be great." Thus it is reasonable to prefer "even a Caesar Borgia to a Parsifal". (3).

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1. Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht, sect. 383, p. 261

2. Gide: O.C. III, p.225; Nietzsche: Ecce Homo, Werke, vol.II, p. 1101

3. Nietzsche: ibid.

As early as the mid 1890's Gide had formulated the same clear-cut "doctrine du péché". Quoting Goethe's remark that, "Il n'y a pas de si grands crimes que je ne me sois senti à certains jours capable de commettre", Gide comments, "les plus grandes intelligences sont aussi les plus capables de grands crimes que d'ordinaire ils ne commettent pas, par sagesse, par amour, et parce qu'elles s'y limiteraient... Etant capable de tout le mal, et n'en rien faire, et voilà le bien; sinon vertu est ignorance et pauvreté." (1)

Gide then values the potentiality for crime, and not the crime in itself. He admires great criminals, because of the energy and force underlying their crimes, but he cannot condone their actions. The circle is the same one which tormented Raskolnikov: "The criminal is evil and to be rejected. Yet why do I involuntarily feel so insignificant, so weak, and horrible to say, so ordinary, before him?" (2) By making this underlying potentiality a necessary ingredient of heroism, but imposing self-restraint or sublimation of the energy as a natural corollary, Gide caters to both his taste for heroic defiance

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1. Littérature et Morale, O.C. II, p. 414

2. Dostoevsky: "Crime and Punishment", p. 112



and his intelligent social realism... Any of his heroes who do commit crimes, lose their heroism; Michel because of a lack of will-power, or "sagesse"; Protos, Strouvihlou and the other hardened criminals because of a lack of humanity or "amour"; and Lafcadio because he thereby limits himself to a fixed stature with regard to society. (1)

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1. Lafcadio is a latter-day Dandy according to the classic definition of Barbey d'Aurevilly. (Gide lists d'Aurevilly's De Dandysme et de George Brummell three times in Cahier de Lectures for 1891) "L'idée maîtresse" of the Dandy is to "sembler maître de soi, ne trahir par sa mise comme par sa conduite, aucun attachement particulier - telle est la meilleure méthode pour dominer les autres, ou du minimum, éviter leur empire." (Du Dandysme..., Paris, Lemerre, 1927), p. 27. D'Aurevilly distinguishes between the true, ideal dandy who, as his own subject and object, is unconcerned with moral and social laws, and the hero manqué who tries to assert himself by some form of anti-social action, usually crime. Like Lafcadio, Raskolnikov wonders "si j'étais une créature tremblante ou si j'avais le droit." Gide comments, "Le seul fait que Raskolnikov se pose la question au lieu de la résoudre simplement en agissant nous montre qu'il n'est pas vraiment un surhomme. Sa faillite est complète." (O.C. XI, p. 271) We are reminded of Oedipe's claim: "Il y en a qui se demandent...dois-je céder le pas? ai-je le droit de passer outre? Pour moi, j'agis toujours...par intuition...comme conseillé par un dieu." (Oedipe, T.C., Vol. IV, p. 65)
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### The Problem of Action

Ethics is generally considered inseparable from action or behaviour. It is defined as "the science which deals with the Ideal, or with the Standard of Rightness and Wrongness, Good and Evil, involved in Conduct." (1)  
 "Virtue exists only in activity," (2)

Yet Nietzsche, thinking no doubt of the Greeks, points out that "the designations of moral value were at first applied to men and were only derivatively and at a later date applied to actions." (3) Freud tends to agree with this assessment and suggests that the earlier attitude was the more realistic one. "The proper subject matter of ethics is character, and only in reference to the character structure as a whole can value statements be made about single traits or actions." (4)

Gide, too, would seem to adhere to this line of reasoning. His continual emphasis on the individual and his motivation; his fascination for an amoral or disinterested action; his portrayal of the hero as a martyr by his very presence or character which inspires others to act; and finally his

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1. Mackenzie: "Manual of Ethics", p. 19
  2. Ibid, p. 14
  3. Nietzsche: Jenseits von Gut und Böse, sect. 260. Werke, vol. II, p. 730
  4. Freud: "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis", trans. by J. Strachey, London, Hogarth, 1962. (Vol. XV of the "Complete Works"), p. 228

own personal inability to come to grips with action as an immediate outlet for sublimated energy, all lead us to this conclusion. The importance of ethics for Gide lies in attitudes, potentiality, and character, not in action. Time and again we have discovered that he considers it preferable not to act (as in the case of crime); yet the ethical code he proposes for the hero is still very much a part of this rejection.

The first two tendencies, Gide's interest in motivation rather than implementation, and the "acte gratuit" were considered in the last chapter. We will confine ourselves here to the last two, the emphasis on character, and the problem of action in Gide's own life.

"Ce n'est point tant par ses actes qu'un homme amoureux de l'humanité se rend utile, que par son exemple."

(1) Gide's concept of heroism suggests that the same process underlies all of man's endeavours, whether in art, ethics or psychology: potentiality is more valuable than assertion; energy which is experienced but deliberately maintained or sublimated is more invigorating than immediate release and satisfaction. The power or force of an individual

is directly related to this fund of stored-up energy; the more powerful the man, the less he has to act since his capacity or potentiality for sublimation is increased. He is then in a position to infuse this energy into others. Rivière, the hero of Saint-Exupéry's Vol de Nuit represents for Gide an excellent example of this brand of heroism. "Rivière n'agit pas, il fait agir, insuffle à ses pilotes sa vertu, exige d'eux le maximum et les contraint à la prouesse." (1) Corydon, like Rivière, hopes to inspire others by the sheer fact of his "valeur, probité, et droiture." And Gide himself could claim at the end of his life the same excuse for inaction as he had earlier attributed to Goethe: "Il a pensé que le spectacle de son bonheur contribuerait plus au bonheur des autres que de dures et douloureuses luttes contre leur misère." (2)

Gide, then, experienced a certain measure of this wilful rejection of action for a superior state of "character" in his own life. But by far the most significant reason for his apparent rejection of action as the focal point of ethics, is the same limiting result that made him reject choice in Les Nourritures terrestres and crime in Les Caves

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1. Préfaces, p. 57-58

2. J. I, p. 44 (1893)

du Vatican.

Action, along with its beneficial effects of purgation and release, necessarily entails commitment, a force which Gide never failed to see as pernicious and undesirable.

"J'ai peur...de m'y compromettre. Je veux dire de limiter par ce que je fais, ce que je pourrais faire. De penser que parce que j'ai fait ceci, je ne pourrai plus faire cela, voilà qui devient intolérable." (1)

Action had always appeared ambiguous to Gide. In a letter to his mother around 1895, he says, "Toutes les actions intéressées me dégoûtent, et les autres ne me paraissent que noble folie." (2) Action demands consistency, and its motivation is always suspect. "C'est une fatalité! On ne l'apprend qu'en agissant; un premier acte vous engage; il éduque, mais compromet." (3)

Once again Gide found his solution in the work of art. Art reconciles both these difficulties by furnishing a medium for heroic example and inspiration through force of character; it also may substitute for physical action in everyday life.

Like Rivière, Gide claims, "J'aime mieux faire agir

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1. Conversation avec un Allemand, O.C. IX, p. 142 (1904)
  2. Letter to Mme. Gide, 17 March, 1895, quoted by Delay, vol. II, p. 477
  3. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 180

que d'agir." (1) This applies to both real life and to the manipulation of his fictional characters. The effect of his writing on the young people who were inspired by his example is unequivocal. "J'ai puisé chez vous la force de m'arracher à un confort bourgeois et matériel," (2) claims one admirer. The enthusiastic "fièvre d'amour" of Les Nourritures terrestres best illustrates this ability of a work of art to incite the reader to vigour and action - "qui mobilise toutes les énergies de l'âme". (3) Gide, taking as an example the great loves (and suicides) inspired by Werther, comments, "Que de héros cachés qui n'attendent que l'exemple du héros d'un livre, qu'une étincelle de vie échappée à sa vie pour vivre, que sa parole pour parler..." (4)

Gide's gratification on inspiring others to heroic action, and his own catharsis in creativity are linked in this explanation. "...l'action ne m'intéresse point tant par la sensation qu'elle me donne que par ses suites, son retentissement. Voilà pourquoi, si elle m'intéresse passionnément, je crois qu'elle m'intéresse davantage

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1. Conversation avec un Allemand, O.C. IX, p. 142
  2. Letter to Gide from Bernard Enginger, 24 February, 1946. (J. II, p. 294) Yvonne Davet lists dozens of letters proclaiming the same sentiments from contemporaries and admirers of Gide on the publication of this work. (p. 127-37)
  3. Letter to Gide from A. Samain, 18 June, 1897 (Davet, p. 123)
  4. (Gide: L'Evolution du Théâtre, O.C. IV, p. 216)

encore commise par un autre." (1)

There is considerable food for thought in this regard to be found in Gide's interpretation of Dostoevsky's intellectual heroes who are, by the fact of their intelligence, incapable of action.

"De là à prétendre que l'action présuppose certaine médiocrité intellectuelle, il n'y a qu'un pas. L'homme d'action, selon Dostoevsky, doit être un esprit médiocre, car l'esprit altier est empêché d'agir lui-même; il verra dans l'action une compromission, une limitation de sa pensée;... nous trouvons cet inquiétant rapport...qui s'établit entre un être pensant et celui qui, sous l'inspiration du premier et comme à sa place, agira." (2)

While this statement does not, of course imply that Gide sympathized with this interpretation, it must be admitted that it does bear a close resemblance to the reasons he gave for his own inability to act.

The process of making others act so as to observe the "retentissement" of the action accommodates itself admirably to Gide's ideas on the creation of fiction. Edouard goes so far as to claim that this transposition of action into one's characters supplants the need for action in real life. "Je ne vis que par autrui." In a more general sense, the same claim can be made of art as a whole. Benedetto Croce, one of our greatest aestheticians, claims,

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1. Conversation avec un Allemand, O.C. IX, p. 142
  2. Dostoevsky, O.C. XI, p. 272-75

with Gide, that one of the main functions of art is catharsis. The artist elaborates and objectifies his impressions, thus freeing himself from them. "This liberating and purifying function of art is an aspect of its character as activity." (1) Everything that liberates drives away passivity and thus constitutes a form of activity. Gide always considered art a form of action, and we are reminded that he often applies to art adjectives with moral connotations which are generally applied to action. (2)

Thus, although action, like commitment, constituted a problem for Gide throughout his life, he did come to grips with it in that he learned to transpose into the aesthetic field the energy and élan which he hesitated to express directly in action. He was more interested in the "psychology" of action than in its ethical connotations, for he maintained that ethics or morality referred to an individual's character and way of life; in other words, to the total man, whose actions may be arbitrary or gratuit.

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1. Croce: "Aesthetic", trans. by Douglas Ainslie, N.Y., Noonday Press, 1909, p. 21. See also Arthur Koestler, "The Act of Creation", London, Hutchinson, 1964, chapter XV
2. In 1905 Gide writes of "les qualités morales de l'oeuvre d'art" and defines "la morale" as "une dépendance de l'esthétique". (Chroniques de l'Ermitage, O.C. IV, p. 387) And again, "Il me semble que les qualités que nous nous plaçons à appeler classiques sont surtout des qualités morales;" he goes on to cite as the prime virtue of Classicism "la modestie" while, "le romantisme est toujours accompagné d'orgueil, d'infatuation" (Réponse à une Enquête sur le Classicisme, O.C. X, p. 25-26) See also J. I, p. 794 (1924)



## Chapter V: The Hero and Society

One of the most controversial aspects of Gide's writings and his way of life is his position with regard to society. He is generally considered to have moved from an early Symbolist aloofness through a period of active attack against many aspects of the established order and those who upheld it, to a growing concern and commitment during the war years, and finally towards an altruistic serenity during the last three decades of his life.

We propose to investigate the applicability of these divisions and their relation to Gide's overall concept of heroism. This investigation will deal with the problem both on the level of attitudes (individualism versus concern for the whole), and actual practice (freedom versus commitment).

What must be recognized immediately is that Gide did not share many of his critics' priorities, and rarely applied himself to social questions until he was almost sixty years old. His lack of involvement with the problems of the work-a-day world during his childhood, and his "formation protestante" according to his own admission, "inclinaît mon esprit presque exclusivement vers les problèmes moraux." (1) He maintained this position

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1. Ainsi Soit-il, J. II, p. 1175

throughout his life, saying around the turn of the century, "Question sociale? Certes, mais la question morale est antécédente," (1) and again several decades later, "il sied de s'en prendre moins aux institutions qu'à l'homme... c'est lui d'abord et surtout qu'il importe de réformer." (2)

Yet Gide's very real social awareness is evidenced in many ways: by his genuine concern for justice, whether in the Congo or in the Assize Court; his leanings towards the Communist ideology; (3) his bonne formule, "Assumer le plus possible d'humanité"; and his inability to disregard "les autres" in spite of his Nietzschean theorizing. In 1931 he claimed that, "Ceux qui vont de l'avant sans crainte de blesser autrui, je les admire et les envie." Yet his next comments show that he is far from reaching this stage himself. "Combien je me sens empêché sans cesse par la sympathie. Sentir sans cesse que ma pensée peut et doit meurtrir ceux que j'aime." (4)

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1. Littérature et Morale, O.C. II, p. 423. In an interview with Pierre-Quint, Gide adds, "Je me retiens d'étudier les problèmes sociaux; ils ne sont de ma partie." (André Gide, p. 496) This particular entretien is dated 1931.
  2. L'Avenir de l'Europe, O.C. XI, p. 135
  3. Gide at first hoped to find in Communism a greater emphasis on and support for the individual. (J. I, p. 1116-18)
  4. J. I, p. 1094-95

Gide also finds himself unable to accept this theory of detachment put into practice by others. He condemns Montherlant's "désinvolture ... et "liberté d'esprit", ce qui je le crains bien, n'est qu'egoïste désintéressement de la chose publique," (1) Gide himself was profoundly moved by both wars, and political engagement of some sort became inevitable. "On reste engoncé jusqu'au coeur et souffrant avec ceux qui souffrent." (2)

This apparent reversal of attitude from the early self-centered individualism was not so much a case of becoming interested for the first time in "la question de cote de l'humanité", but of stressing a new aspect: "l'humanité du moins telle qu'elle est, non telle qu'elle pourrait être." (3) Bearing in mind his devotion thirty years earlier to exactly the opposite arrangement, we can detect a definite and natural distinction between the reality of Gide's social concern and the supra-reality of his "more important" themes. He admitted that the hero could not exist in reality and claimed that the task of fiction was to "ramener le caractère français vers le

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1. J. II, p. 79.

2. Ibid, p. 78.

3. J. I, p. 904 (1929).

gout de l'héroïsme." (1) In studying Gide's social position then, we must take into account this distinction: his vacillation between commitment and individuality represents to some extent the larger opposition between reality and "la création du cerveau" the latter of which he often claimed was "plus réelle que l'autre". (2) There is little doubt in which realm his concept of heroism is situated.

The tendency in Gide's character towards commitment and altruism is related to his need for order, restraint, and rules, since both concern man as a social animal, whereas the opposite group of tendencies are directed towards assertion and individuality and concern only the personal self. (3) We have demonstrated that Gide situated true freedom and heroism in the balance between these opposing forces. Yet it would now seem that, as far as the social equivalents of these drives are concerned, Gide allowed the former, humanitarian ones to predominate from

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1. J. II, p. 247 (1943)

2. J. I, p. 890 (1928)

3. This has, in fact been the approach taken by the few critics who have dealt extensively with the latter part of Gide's life, most notably, H.M. Feyer, whose work "Gide, Dostoevsky and Freedom", Gide praised as "une des meilleures sinon la meilleure même qu'on ait jamais écrit sur moi". (Letter to Feyer, 1944, Preface) Feyer's main thesis is that it is the latter part of Gide's life which represents his conclusive thinking and philosophy, and this period is best characterised by social altruism and "seraphic serenity". The fiery heroism of the pre-war years is only a stage in this development.

the nineteen-twenties onwards. Should this be the case, we must accept the idea of a further development in Gide's concept of heroism towards a socially integrated and altruistic hero. We maintain, however, that the same heroic and often anti-social individualism which Gide favoured in the early part of the century remained a prime tenet of his philosophy throughout his life. If this tendency was at times overcome by an opposing force of humanitarianism and social concern, the triumph was temporary and not to any degree conclusive.

Gide's view of the heroic in this context can, perhaps, be seen in its clearest perspective if we consider the extent of his veneration for the "complete humanist", Goethe, and if we also consider Gide's reaction to the very real crisis of the heroic ideal raised by Nazism.

For Gide, Goethe was "le génie auquel, sans doute, je dois plus qu'à aucun autre, peut-être même qu'à tous les autres réunis." (1) More important for our study, the heroic ideal presented by Goethe is, "exemplaire: je veux dire que c'est à l'instar de cela que l'on voudrait vivre et penser." (2)

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1. Goethe, N.R.F., March, 1932, p. 368

2. J. II, p. 22 (1940)

One of the main aspects of Goethe's life which Gide cites for admiration is the abdication of his early flamboyant Sturm und Drang Romanticism for a more restrained and more productive equilibrium. His "image idéale de l'homme" "ne s'accomplit pas seulement, pas surtout dans le regimement, mais bien dans une patiente prise en considération des lois, tant divines qu'humaines." (1) Identifying a link between Goethe's attitude in this regard and that of Montaigne, Gide admires such an approach, "qui ne songe point seulement à sa satisfaction égoïste mais également au bonheur ou profit d'autrui." (2)

Yet there is a persistent doubt in the midst of all this praise. The works of Goethe which Gide prefers are not the later Classical masterpieces, but the early lyrics, Terquato Tasso, (3) the segments of Faust II dealing with Faust's love for Helen, and above all, the Prometheus which first taught him "que rien de grand ne fut tenté par l'homme qu'en révolte contre les dieux." (4)

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1. Préface au Théâtre Complet de Goethe, Préfaces, p. 101 (1942).

2. Essai sur Montaigne, O.C. XV, p.23.

3. See Préfaces, p. 105-6. Gide quotes the opposing moralities of the Princesse ("Tout ce qui convient est permis") and of Tasso ("Tout ce qui plaît est permis."). In them he sees a symbol of his own dilemma.

4. Goethe, N.R.F., p. 375.

In 1940, supposedly at the height of his own "bonhomie souriante" (1) Gide wrote: "Si das Schaudern est la meilleure part de l'homme, il est la meilleure part de Goethe également ... Pour tempéré, pour raisonnable qu'il soit et s'efforce d'être, c'est dans l'inexpliqué, l'inexplicable et ce qu'il appellerait: le démoniaque qu'il m'apparaît le plus grand." (2)

Flora Ross, perhaps the main commentator on the Gide-Goethe relationship feels that Gide's eventual attitudes were very much in line with Goethe's tempered social altruism. Yet not only does Gide situate much of Goethe's greatness in "le démoniaque" rather than in his restraint and humanitarianism, he even ventures to question these very tendencies. In the two articles which Gide wrote on Goethe, he expresses the same, generally overlooked, reservation. "Ce mot de "renoncement" n'abrite-t-il pas quelque nostalgie des embruns? Quelque regret secret de ce que son élan premier comportait de générosité, d'héroïsme?" (3) Earlier he had stated that, "Cette longanimité de Goethe me paraît aujourd'hui quelque peu compromettante ... si c'est par souci de tranquillité, de confort, voici qui grandit d'autant, à mes

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1. J. II, p. 34 (1940).

2. J. II, p. 32 (1940). The same opinion is expressed in Feuillets, O.C. XV, p. 515-16.

3. Préfaces, p. 114.

yeux, l'attitude incisive de Nietzsche." (1) Later in the same article Gide raises another related criticism, this time of Goethe's orderly, socially-acceptable psychology.

"Son oeuvre... n'a pas de ces replis mystérieux où s'abrite l'angoisse suprême et ses ténèbres." (2) Ten years later he was again writing about Goethe and he couldn't refrain from expanding on this point. "Qu'on me permette de déplorer cette horreur de l'obscurité. Je la tiens pour la plus grande faiblesse-erreur de Goethe. C'est par là qu'il rejoint Voltaire, par là que Shakespeare et Dante s'écartent de lui pour ne craindre point de s'enfoncer l'un parmi les ombres douloureuses, l'autre dans les noirs affreux de l'âme humaine." (3)

Gide's Journal for the early forties reveals other, similar reservations concerning the very aspects of Goethe which he would certainly have praised, had his philosophy of life really moved nearer to that of the German. (4) Thus, although Goethe taught Gide perhaps his greatest lessons in the balancing of opposing forces and the motto "passer outre",

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1. Goethe, N.R.F., p. 375.

2. Ibid., p. 377.

3. Préfaces, p. 119.

4. J. II, pp. 45, 196, 225.



Gide could never totally sanction the more classical or socially-aware attitudes which resulted in Goethe's final serenity. As early as 1895 Gide recognized that these attitudes represented an irreconcilable difference between Goethe's Apollonian ideal and his own "subjectivité exaspérée." He confided to Marcel Drouin that "Goethe m'occupe; comme il pouvait occuper Novalis, en ennemi." (1) By 1943 he has identified the source of this difference: "Goethe n'enseigne pas l'héroïsme et nous avons besoin de héros." (2)

From this first example then we may gather that Gide's later altruism does not represent a change in outlook with regard to heroism but merely a practical answer to an immediate problem. His renunciation, too, shelters a considerable amount of "nostalgie secret... de générosité et d'héroïsme ." (3)

The two wars which Gide lived through, made it almost essential for a writer to become socially involved. In 1931 Gide emphasizes this distinction between reality and what it could be: "Je me demande parfois: est-il véritablement, nécessaire de se sacrifier pour une humanité si lamentable,

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1. Letter to Drouin, 3 Dec. 1895, quoted by Delay, Vol. II, p. 654.
  2. Interviews Imaginaires, p. 46. (N.Y. Schiffrin, 1943)
  3. The pressure is exemplified by a letter from a magistrate in Pau in 1942. (J. II, p. 135-36.)

pour cette humanité?"(1) Gide would have been hard indeed not to have suffered in response to the misery he saw all around him. He did suffer, and he even made an attempt to help with the Foyer Franco-Belge. However the reduction of this sympathy to a person-to-person level of actuality proved too much, and his involvement was short-lived. A much more important indication of his attitudes is presented by the ideologies rather than the practicalities of the war.

When France was defeated in 1940, Gide, along with most of the other cultural leaders, resisted collaboration. But he was forced to recognize a rather uncomfortable fact. Was Hitler's Nazism not merely the culmination of his own cult of heroism?(2) He at first attempted to rationalize his initial tendency to collaborate as the only practical step to take, "de faire de soumission sagesse." (3) But finally, in 1941 he faces the truth. Grateful for the restrictions against free speech, Gide feels that his real instincts, "la voix de l'enfer" "semblerait d'accord avec eux."(4)

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1. Pierre - Quint: André Gide, "Entretiens", p. 496.
  2. We saw in the first chapter how Nietzsche, Carlyle, and many of the Romantics have been condemned for the same reason.
  3. J. II, p. 64.
  4. Ibid., p. 65. (Gide's italics).

Returning to the dialogue form of his earlier works, he conducts a very revealing self-inquiry which must be quoted at some length.

-Mais enfin, pourquoi et contre quoi protesterais-tu? N'as-tu pas dit toi-même: "La famille et la religion sont les deux plus grands ennemis du progrès"? Ne considérerais-tu pas l'humanité, telle qu'elle est encore, prosternée, vautrée, comme abjecte? Ne méprisais-tu pas de tout coeur les médiocres intérêts qui retiennent l'homme de s'élever au-dessus de lui-même? N'as-tu pas même écrit, du temps que ta pensée était hardie: "Je n'aime pas l'homme; j'aime ce qui le dévore"? .... N'as-tu pas, du temps que tu t'occupais de jardinage, compris que le seul moyen de préserver, protéger, sauvegarder l'exquis, le meilleur, c'était de supprimer le moins bon? Tu sais bien que cela ne va pas sans apparence de cruauté, mais que cette cruauté, c'est prudence...

Aussitôt l'autre voix s'élève... Que parles-tu de meilleur? Le travail entrepris par celui qui se veut grand jardinier de l'Europe, ce travail n'est pas tant surhumain qu'inhumain. ... Ton rêve est grand, Hitler; mais pour qu'il réussisse, il en coûte trop cher. Et s'il échoue (car il est trop surhumain pour réussir), qu'en restera-t-il sur la terre, en fin de compte, que deuil et que dévastation?" (1)

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1. J. N., p. 65-66 (1941). The strength of the Nazi temptation is illustrated by another dialogue, written a year later, which Gide later regretted. Another "de ces voix intérieures" condemns the utopian dreams of Gide's earlier altruistic theories. "Je ne suis pas un rêveur, je suis un réalisateur". This new voice claims the right to use force "fût-ce la plus brutale" to better humanity according to his own superior vision since it is incapable of bettering itself. "Décence, morale, pitié, justice, ne sont que des vains mots pour moi.... Aussi longtemps que l'humanité sera ce qu'elle est encore, la liberté qu'on accorde aux hommes - aboutira, tu le sais bien, non point à l'harmonie mais au désordre. Restreindre cette liberté ne me suffit

The second "voix" carried the day. But the first one was not to be quelled completely. (1) Gide cannot entirely support his country against its enemy when that enemy is essentially closer to his heroic ideal.

"Vous dirai-je toute ma pensée? Je crois qu'il est bon pour la France qu'elle subisse pour un temps ce joug d'une discipline imposée. De même qu'elle n'était pas capable, au point de relâchement moral et de décomposition où elle était tombée, de remporter une réelle victoire sur un adversaire bien mieux outillé qu'elle, uni, résolu, tenace, pugnace, et sagement mené par un chef décidé à passer outre tous les scrupules qui nous affaiblissent, tous les considérants qui nous encombre; de même, je ne crois pas la France capable aujourd'hui de se relever toute seule et par ses seuls moyens du bord." (2)

Again then, we can conclude that Gide's earlier individualism, based on a balance between freedom and self-

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... pas; je la dois supprimer tout entière. Qu'importe le sacrifice de quelques millions d'êtres abjects, totalement incapable de parvenir jusqu'au plus médiocre bonheur par eux-mêmes. Cet holocauste est nécessaire pour permettre d'élever sur ce misérable débris, une race saine, forte et joyeuse. Sur tel enjeu la partie vaut d'être jouée, ne trouves-tu pas? en vaut la peine; et même une très grande peine." J. II, p. 118-119. (1942). Also J. II, p. 209, 232. Gide sympathized with Goethe who felt the same instinctive and unpatriotic admiration for an earlier hero - Napoleon. "Comment n'être pas ébloui de ce rêve..." (Préfaces, p. 114-15).

1. E.M. Forster unconsciously echoes this dichotomy when he writes, praising Gide's refusal to co-operate with the enemy; "I do not want to present Gide as a hero. He wouldn't wish it, and he isn't the type. He is not a hero, he is a humanist." ("Humanist and Authoritarian: André Gide and Stefan George", "The Listener", 26 Aug., 1943, p. 242).
2. J. II, p. 66-67

imposed restraint, remained with him even in the midst of a war that would be expected to soften the hardest misanthropist.

Gide's social concern was genuine and very real; but it existed side by side with his individualism. The state of "seraphic" serenity which has been ascribed to him would in general, be rejected as "sensibilerie philanthropique." (1)

We can put our conclusions to the test by applying them to the depiction of heroic social involvement in Gide's works. The evolution is undeniable: Gide proceeds from the solitary heroism of Philoctète, to the state of Thebes which is ruled jointly by Creon, who respected tradition and laws, and Oedipe whose daring and initiative counteract this force and provide the "levain"; (2) and finally to Athens where Thésée, the most perfect of Gide's heroes devotes himself to the task of social betterment and just rule. But is the pattern really so conclusive?

Thésée is undoubtedly Gide's most heroic hero. And it is just as evident that what Gide considered most directly heroic in him was his daring and "défi: défi à la règle, à la nature, à la morale, aux lois." (3) This side of Theseus is explored to the exclusion of all others in the most important preliminary sketch of the character in Un Esprit

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1. Feuillets, O.C. XIII, p. 434

2. Oedipe, T.C. Vol. IV, p. 80.

3. Un Esprit non Prévenu, p. 76

non Prévenu. This sketch (several pages long) has been unaccountably overlooked by most of the major commentators on the Gide-Thésée relationship. (1) Gide clearly states his case: "Dans Thésée je ne vois rien que d'héroïque... Il y a dans tous ses exploits quelque chose de plus que hardi, de délirant, d'abominable, et de féroce. Rien de philanthropique et de doux..." (2)

Yet a decade later, in the fully developed Theseus, Gide emphasizes the wisdom and discipline of the founder of Athens. Surely this would indicate a tempering of his own views, and a definitive tendency towards social sympathy.

It is true that Theseus clearly abandoned his earlier untrammelled individualism; "Le temps de l'aventure est révolu, il n'agissait plus de conquérir, mais de régner." (3) But there are many types of resignation. The same movement towards order and restraint is evident in that other heroic king, Oedipe. The Oedipe whom Thésée welcomes to Colonus is old, repentant and resigned in a Dostoevskian faith. Their

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1. Few, if any, of the important Gide critics include this little book of random writings (the majority of which we have not been able to locate elsewhere in Gide's work) in his bibliography. Even the masterly notes by Y. Davet and J. Thierry in the Pléiade edition which outline all previous allusions to Thésée overlook this one and Helen Watson-Williams, who unearths earlier, minor sketches from the Fonds Gide appears to ignore this sketch, as well as the other important considerations on Greek mythology contained only in Un Esprit.

2. Un Esprit non Prévenu, p. 76-77

3. Thésée, R.R.S. p. 1445

meeting represents once again the counterbalancing of Gide's conflicting ideologies. Gide earlier described it as, "Une rencontre décisive des deux héros, se mesurant l'un à l'autre." (1) Resignation and faith in the gods meet affirmation and faith in man. As we might have expected neither triumph, but there is little doubt which brand of resignation Gide advocates. Thésée condemns a less noble example of Oedipe's solution in his friend Pirithoüs in very Gidean prose: "Veilli lui-même c'est dans la tempérance qu'il laissait s'assoupir sa sagesse, lui naguère si entreprenant. Il n'apportait plus que restreinte et que limitation dans son conseil." (2)

Theseus' answer is different. When Pirithoüs urges him to "Calme-toi, n'a-tu pas fait suffisamment?", Gide himself answers, "De ce monde si imparfait, et qui pourrait être si beau, honni celui qui se contente! L'ainsi soit-il, dès qu'il favorise une carence, est impie." (3) Theseus did reach a form of serenity, but it was not the benevolent coming-to-terms with the collective which is commonly associated with this hero. He is devoted to his city, but there is little if any evidence of real feeling or devotion for other human beings. He never felt any attachment for anyone: he

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1. J. I, p. 1022 (1931) Although Gide's admiration for Oedipe's route was genuine, he could not help but side with Thésée.
  2. Thésée, p. 1448
  3. J. I, p. 1224 (1935)

abandoned or ignored the women who loved him; he probably (according to Gide) killed his father; ("Egée m'empêchait ... obstruant ma carrière"), (1) and rejected his closest friend when their philosophies of life evolved differently, ("la constance d'une amitié nous retient ou nous tire en arrière"). (2) In fact his only real attachment was for his son, and even then not as a person, but as his heir. At the risk of generalizing, we could even claim that none of Gide's heroes experiences any real or meaningful love for others or remorse at hurting them. Love tends to be abstracted and objectivized and pity and remorse forbidden. (3)

Theseus is happy because of his main achievement - the founding of Athens. "J'ai fait ma ville. Après moi, saura l'habiter immortellement ma pensée." (4) His pride is not related to the social benefits accruing to others through the founding of this free, new city, as much as to the creation of a purely personal legacy which will give him a form of immortality. The connection between this achievement and Gide's own particular legacy - his art - is obvious. And

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1. Thésée, R.R.S. p. 1416-17

2. Ibid., p. 1448.

3. J. II, p. 60 and p. 314. In Les Nouvelles Nourritures Gide claims, "Du moins avais-je su bannir de moi toutes réticences, pudeurs, réserves de la décence, hésitations timorées, qui font la volupté craintive et prédisposent l'âme aux remords après le retombement de la chair." (R.R.S. p. 281)

4. Thésée, p. 1453



it seems entirely reasonable to assume that Gide's main concern, too, is still, as it has always been, his own individuality rather than "les autres"; and the hero himself rather than the hero in society.

Gide sums up the inability to really become involved in society in Ainsi Soit-il, confirming at the same time our earlier suggestion that social concern represented a facet of reality, to which Gide often preferred the aesthetic and heroic equivalent. "Je suis capable d'indignation devant certains abus de force, injustices ou lâchetés; mais, la plupart du temps, le spectacle que j'ai devant les yeux n'éveille aucun désir de jugement; pas plus que la contemplation d'un paysage, ou d'une plante ou d'un insecte. Encore que certains humains, je le reconnais, soient répugnants; mais je reporte aussitôt les regards vers ceux que je puis aimer et même, parfois, trouver admirables."

(1).

Gide's detractors, who claim that he is a malfaiteur are then justified to the extent that this hero never quite adjusts to the demands of society. Freedom should be voluntarily restrained for the sake of self-development, but not necessarily for the development of the society.

## Chapter VI: The Faith of the Hero

Carlyle has said that a man's religion is in every sense, "the chief fact with regard to him". Not, he adds, "the church-creed" which he professes and which is often only "an assertion from the outworks of the man, from the mere argumentative region of him". Rather, his religion (and it may be non-religion) is the thing a man knows for certain in his heart "concerning his vital relations to this mysterious Universe, and his duty and destiny there." (1)

This statement is eminently applicable to André Gide. Few of the devoutly religious have been as deeply concerned with the question of "l'homme et la divinité" (2) as this sceptic and iconoclast. And as faith is perhaps the chief fact of his life, so too is it a major consideration in assessing the way of life of the Gidean hero.

We saw in Chapter I that the adolescent Gidé was deeply and fervently religious. This attitude would seem to be the result of an inherent spirituality rather than of the Protestantism in which his mother had conscientiously

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1. Carlyle: "On Heroes", p. 2

2. Gide: Ainsi Soit-il, J. II, p. 1173

raised him. Even as a boy, Gide's religion was a celebration of mystical exaltation which was nourished by the Bible, more than by orthodox dogma. His first communion, traditionally a great incentive to devotion, is described by Gide as inconsequential. Far from bringing "une extase nouvelle" or augmenting his present fervour, he claims "je fus plutôt gêné par la sorte d'apparat et d'officialité...qui presque le profanait à mes yeux." (1) Gide experienced the same "déconvenue" during the official Bible classes of M. Couve. His own religion was born of an instinctively pious nature and sought not proofs nor church sanctions, but the pure joy of personal exaltation in a vague, subjective God, who was probably, even now, more pagan than Christian. Armed with this instinctive faith, Gide approached "les mystères saints comme on s'approchait d'Eleusis." (2)

Thus, even while professing the Protestant faith, Gide was practising a very unorthodox, very personal form of worship. This religion was well suited to the two main components of his natural dichotomy, as it existed during this formative period of his life. On the one hand, his religion fulfilled his intense desire for

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1. Si le Grain, O.C. X, p. 266

2. Ibid, p. 264

mysticism, piety, self-sacrifice and "macération"; (1) in other words, his need to identify with some greater force and thus avoid the responsibility of self-determination. Yet, on the other hand, Gide found in this faith not the humble acceptance of suffering preached by traditional Christianity, but joy, personal exaltation and a glorification of his own nascent individuality.

During the crisis of 1893, Gide rejected religious faith as the main guideline of his life. He realized at this point that the main elements of his faith were not necessarily associated with orthodox Christianity, and that the limits imposed by the acceptance of such an orthodoxy actually proved detrimental to it. These elements, "exaltation, amour, et étrange soif de dénueement"(2) had always been in themselves the essence of Gide's faith and not merely the channels for belief in a Protestant God. Gide simply transferred the fervour from a transcendental object to an immediate one - life, here and now. The Bible, too, remained and Gide incorporated it into his new religion, seeking in it justification for

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1. Si le Grain, O.C. X, p. 267

2. Ibid., p. 443

the philosophy of Les Nourritures terrestres.

Gide had no sooner recognized the discrepancies between his own faith and the Christian dogmas, than he began to attack that dogma in an effort to free those still enslaved by it. There were many ways in which Gide felt that the Churches were at fault. His occasional attempts at reconciliation with either Protestantism or Catholicism (for example, during the crisis of 1916) which led many to think that he was on the verge of conversion, represented circumstantial and transitory phases in his development. Such leanings were always repudiated as weaknesses later. (1) His most definitive view was stated in 1949: "Les Eglises et la Foi ont vraiment fait trop de mal. Je ne peux pas rester indifférent; jusqu'au bout je me refuserai à accepter cela. Il faut détrôner les Eglises! Déjouer leurs ruses! Arracher l'homme à leur envoûtement." (2)

We will consider Gide's arguments against the Churches first, and afterwards attempt to determine the nature of the faith which he substituted for orthodox dogma.

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1. In 1917, for instance, Gide wrote "Il me paraît que j'étais niais et coupable d'incliner artificiellement mon esprit pour le disposer à comprendre mieux l'enseignement catholique..." (J, I, p. 619)
  2. To Roger Martin du Gard. Notes sur André Gide: 1913-1951 (Paris: Gallimard, 1952) p. 150

Gide's lifelong refusal to reduce life to a single principle, system or philosophy made it impossible for him to accept any form of monism, much less any particular Christian faith. "La vérité," claimed André Walter, "est multiple, infinie, nombreuse autant que les esprits pour y croire." (1) Yet, "Chaque religion prétend au monopole de la vérité révélée... C'est ainsi que les religions, chacune prétendant unir tous les hommes, les divisent." (2) The only form of "religion" which Gide could accept must be one which "tend à comprendre et à absorber toutes formes de vie...même celles qui le nient." (3) Such an undogmatic approach obviously excludes most of the accepted orthodoxies. Only a general creed of humanism can afford to be heterogeneous. Christianity professes one Truth (its own), one good and therefore one model of virtue which each member must follow. It thus denies the Bible, which, according to Gide, encourages individuality and heterogeneity. (4)

The Bible is in contention with the church on many other issues as well. In fact, Gide goes so far as to

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1. O.C. I, p. 54 : Bernard repeats the same thought several decades later in Les Faux Monnayeurs, O.C. XII, p. 285
  2. J. I, p. 1169 (1933)
  3. J. I, p. 816 (1926)
  4. "Le christianisme s'oppose aux caractères, proposant à chaque homme un idéal commun." (L'Evolution du Théâtre, O.C. IV, p. 213)

claim with Nietzsche that "the church is constructed out of the antithesis to the Gospel." (1)

The basis of this discrepancy seems to be the intervention of St. Paul. "Ce n'est jamais au Christ, c'est à Saint Paul que je me heurte - et c'est en lui, jamais dans l'Evangile que je retrouve tout ce qui m'avait écarté." (2) The pastor of La Symphonie Pastorale recognizes how much of what the Church has come to consider Christianity actually reveals "non des paroles du Christ, mais des commentaires de Saint Paul." (3)

Throughout his work, Gide's portrayal of the Church, (whether Catholic or Protestant) and its clergy, is totally irreconcilable with his treatment of Christ and the Bible. L'Abbé Bredel, the pastor of La Symphonie, and Tirésias in Oedipe all represent the demoralizing and stagnating influence of authoritarian religions. "Dans la crainte de Dieu", claims Tirésias, "gît mon pouvoir." (4) Perhaps the most perfect product of such a religion is

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1. Der Antichrist, sect. 36. Werke, Vol. II, p. 1197-98  
Gide wrote in a letter to Ruyters in 1918, "l'enseignement l'éthique et l'esthétique qu'il (l'Evangile) recèle est très différent (et parfois jusqu'à s'y opposer) de ment des églises ou de l'Eglise." 2 March, 1918.  
"Deux lettres sur Dostoïevsky et Nietzsche", Australian Journal of French Studies, 1970, Vol. VII, #1-2 p. 18
  2. Numquid et Tu, J., I, p. 599
  3. O.C. IX, p. 62 See also, J. I, p. 300 (1910) Nietzsche and Goethe both agree with Gide in locating St. Paul as the source of the Church's divergence from true Christianity.
  4. Oedipe, T.C. Vol. IV, p. 74

Robert. Although not deliberately hypocritical, he has reached the point where inner sincerity and the simulated gestures and morality of his "church-creed" have become one.

One of the greatest faults of the Church is that it provides an easy, safe path to salvation. Values are preset, transgressions easily forgiven, and a definite reward-punishment system is assigned to the life-hereafter, thereby determining the basis of present day-to-day living. For Gide these advantages of the "le palais de la foi" are weak and unheroic. "Vous y trouvez consolation, assurance et confort. Tout y est ménagé pour protéger votre paresse et garantir l'esprit contre l'effort." (1) The Church, by encouraging such weakness and dependency, has worsened the European race. Gide, in Nouvelles Nourritures calls for a race that is "plus vigoureuse, plus saine, et partant, plus joyeuse." He claims, with Nietzsche that "nous sommes responsables d'à peu près tous les maux dont nous souffrons." (2)

This claim appears to be particularly true in the

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1. J. I, p. 837 (1929) As early as 1939 Gide could see that "Le christianisme avant tout, console; mais il y a des âmes naturellement heureuses et qui n'ont pas besoin d'être consolées. Alors, celles-ci, le christianisme commence par les rendre malheureuses..." (J. I, p. 44)
  2. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, R.R.S., p. 296 Because of this emphasis, "unworldly" came to be identified with "better" or "higher men". Nietzsche claims that "The strong, haughty, manly, conquering and domineering natures were thus turned into agonized consciences and self-destruction." Jenseits von Gut und Böse, sect. 62, Werke, Vol. II, p. 623-4



case of Catholicism with its emphasis on the sacraments, indulgences and other forms of merits for good deeds. Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, perhaps the most powerful representative of the dangers of this faith, condemns Christ for giving man freedom and dignity. He genuinely believes that man is not capable of handling such gifts, and that it is for his own good that the Church imposes the values of "miracle, mystery and authority". "All man asks is to be relieved of freedom and responsibility and be led like a rejoicing sheep." (1)

Catholicism's aim, according to Gide, "est la norme of l'unification". (2) In spite of his early rejection of Protestantism and his occasional leanings towards conversion to the faith of Claudel and Mauriac, Gide maintains that the Protestant ethic, however bad, has at least this advantage over the Catholic: its goal is "l'individualisation" and its means "plus virilisante, encourageant mieux l'effort." (3).

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1. Dostoevsky: "The Brothers Karamazov", p. 270-71
  2. Journal Sans Date, O.C. VI, p. 53 (Not included in Pléiade)
  3. J. II, p. 134 (1942) Gide recognizes a certain degree of revitalizing anarchy in Protestantism rooted in its very origin as a revolt against the old order. (Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 234-35)

What makes Catholicism even more suspect is that it is a counterfeit faith. The very virtues it promulgates for its members are violated by its leaders and its historical tradition. The Roman Church gave in to the third temptation of the devil; it is based, in Aloysha Karamazov's words, "on the simple lust for power, of filthy, earthly power and domination." (1)

Another fault of Christianity in general, (but again more so with Catholicism) is its dependency on the past. The Christian is taught to "chercher aliment dans ce lait de la tradition, distillé, filtré par les hommes." (2) A true Christian faith, based on Christ's words, would be progressive, constantly evolving, not from, but towards, God. (3) Again, Gide claims support from Christianity's own source : "Quoi de plus révolutionnaire

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1. "The Brothers Karamazov", p. 275. (Gide agrees with this claim, O.C. VI, p. 52-53) This attack against the worldliness of Catholicism is an integral part of Dostoevsky's thinking on religion. Myshkin calls the Roman faith, the continuation of the Roman Empire in the West; ("The Idiot", p. 518) and Shatov claims that Catholicism, by requiring an earthly kingdom in order to survive, has proclaimed the Antichrist, and ruined the Western World." ("The Devils", p. 117)
  2. Gide: Les Nouvelles Nourritures, R.R.S. p. 297
  3. Gide maintains that "Ce n'est pas au début, c'est à la fin de l'évolution des êtres qu'il faut chercher Dieu." J. I, p. 553 (1916); see also Feuillets, 1921, J. I, p. 725

que l'Evangile?" (1) The Bible teaches life and joy in the present, not in recourse to the past or in hopes of some vague eternal life in the future. (2)

Christianity preaches a doctrine of sorrow, suffering and expiation. For Gide, the Bible is rather "un effort surhumain vers la joie." (3) "Il a fallu l'abominable interprétation des hommes pour établir sur l'Evangile un culte, une sanctification de la tristesse et de la peine." (4)

The root of this false emphasis on suffering is, according to Gide, the myth of the cross. For the true Christian, suffering is the only assertion of individuality permitted. "C'est notre douleur qui nous donne notre visage particulier," explains Mauriac. "C'est notre croix qui fixe, qui arrête nos contours." (5) Gide admired such sacrifice, recognizing that "le christianisme peut nous mener à l'héroïsme, dont une des plus belles formes est la sainteté." (6) But his own concept of heroism precludes sadness as it precludes resignation.

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1. J.I., p. 710 (1921)

2. This is the main theme of Les Nouvelles Nourritures, and is repeated in many of Gide's other works. See, for example, Numquid et tu, J.I., p. 591 and 604.

3. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, p. 269

4. Ibid, p. 270

5. Mauriac: Dieu et Mammon, Oeuvres, Vol. VII, p. 295

6. Deux Interviews Imaginaires, (N.Y. Schiffern, 1943) p. 46

Commenting on Mauriac's attitude Gide wrote, "Comme il est angoissé! Et que je l'aime ainsi! Mais de quel profit ces angoisses?" (1)

The cross has made of Christ's life a worship of suffering and penance. Gide feels that this emphasis is misplaced and obscures the essential point - Christ's teachings. (2) "La croix de mensonge" (3) has become so much a part of Christianity that in the end, "elle avait triomphé du Christ même." (4)

Gide sees only one method of breaking down this cult of sadness and seeing Christ for what he really is - the teacher of joy and fulfillment. "Pour ne voir dans la crucifixion qu'un accident, ainsi que je tâchais de le faire, il faut d'abord dédiviniser le Christ." (5)

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1. J.I., p. 1047 (1931)

2. Feuillets, 1928, J.I, p. 899. See also J.I, 1049 (1931)

3. Un Esprit non Prévenu, p. 96

4. Feuillets, 1928, J.I, p. 899. See also J.I, 1049 (1931)

Goethe, too, recognized the damaging influence of this emphasis on the crucifixion with its overtones of expiation and suffering. Wilhelm Meister claims that "the destinies of Christian Religions often divided and scattered, must yet meet at last at the cross."

Wanderjahre, Book 1, Chap XII. Nietzsche, whose opposition to this aspect of Christian dogma is well known, praises Goethe's attitude, quoting from his Venetian Epigrams (#67): "The four things which repulse me like venom - Tobacco smoke, garlic, bugs, and the Cross." Der Wille zur Macht, Sect. 175, p. 128

5. J.I, p. 1049 (1931)

Traditional religions thus came to represent for Gide the very antithesis of heroism. The reactionary virtues of resignation, conformity, suffering and sadness, and the denial of self-determination and the worth of the individual must be rejected. In the words of Thésée, "Tout paraissait divin, qui demeurait inexplicable, et la terreur s'épandait sur la religion au point que l'héroïsme souvent semblait impie. Les premières et les plus importantes victoires que devait remporter l'homme, c'est sur les dieux." (1)

Only after destroying the false values is the hero able to turn to the positive task of reconstruction, (2) for, as always with Gide, reconstruction is necessary. He denied Christianity, yet claimed that atheism and scepticism were equally inapplicable. These terms are just as limiting as the religious ones, since they deny spirituality, a necessary component of man's makeup, just as rigorously as Christianity denies reason and will. And Gide, we will remember, possessed perhaps an exceptional

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1. Thésée, R.R.S., p. 1417

2. "Il faut être sans loi pour écouter la loi nouvelle", Gide says in Les Nouvelles Nourritures (p. 255) "J'ai tout balayé. Je me dresse nu sur la terre vierge, devant le ciel à repeupler." (Ibid.)

amount of this spiritual component. (1)

The main nourishment of Gide's faith was the Bible, and he refused to reject Christ along with the worn-out mass of orthodox Christian dogma. In fact, near the end of his life he said, "Pour moi, le Christ est la figure la plus authentiquement admirable." (2) Instead, he adopted his own solution, "dédiviniser le Christ." The religion he built around this figure is equally "dédivinisée". Every aspect of faith and morality focused on one object - "le seul mot de passe - c'est l'Homme."

(3) Just as man is responsible for his own suffering, he can work towards his own betterment. Gide's humanism urges each man to find within himself the inspiration and support he formerly sought in his "church-creed" and in the "gift of grace". "L'homme ne peut-il apprendre à exiger de soi, par vertu, ce qu'il croit exigé par Dieu?" (4)

Dostoevsky's Kirilov first stated the startling truth that "to realize that there is no god and not to realize at the same instant that you yourself have become god is an absurdity." (5) Gide, too, recognized

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1. Gide called this component "la singulière disposition de mon esprit à se laisser griser par le sublime." (Si le Grain, O.C., X, p. 443)

2. Cited by Mallet: Une Mort Ambiguë, p. 45

3. Oedipe, T.C., Vol. IV, p. 92

4. Feuillets d'Automne, J. II, p. 310

5. "The Devils", p. 614

this truth and cites it as a basis for a genuinely spiritual belief in the substitution of man for God, as the center of all energy and activity. "Je pense que l'homme doit chercher à s'élever de ses propres mains, à trouver en lui-même ses forces de perfectionnement." (1) "Et alors, si vous voulez, j'appelle cet effort de dépassement ou de surpassement une divinisation de l'homme." (2)

Yet Gide didn't completely discard the notion of God. He merely divested him of all supernatural connotations. In considering the basis for Gide's ethical theory, we decided that psychology was the science closest related to man as a self-determining unit. God, too, becomes dependent on this criterion. He is merely what man thinks he is; the projection of the ideas and experiences of man throughout history. There is nothing in God which did not have its source in man. This forms the basis for Gide's radical belief that "l'homme est responsable de Dieu." (3) "Paganisme ou Christianisme, c'est d'abord une psychologie

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1. The same idea is expressed in the well-known Journal entry generally quoted in support of his humanism: "Il me paraît monstrueux que l'homme ait besoin de Dieu pour se sentir d'aplomb sur la terre..." J. I, p. 854 (1927).
  2. Gide is careful to deny any connection between his Homme-Dieu and the Christian idea of God. J, 1942-49, p. 281
  3. J. II, p. 114 (1942) This is also the basis for the title of his projected work, "Dieu, Fils de l'Homme". (J. II, p. 263, 1944)

avant d'être une métaphysique." (1)

Man is thus his creator and the creator of his God. The God created by Gide (for each God must therefore be entirely subjective and personal) is, as we might expect, variable and not precisely defined. He is sometimes situated in man's own strivings, and at other times his natural wonder at the perfection of the Universe led him to postulate a God of nature. Late in his life he attempted to clarify the situation, reducing his ideas to his favourite polarized dichotomy.

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"Il ne peut être question de deux dieux. Mais je me garde sous ce nom de Dieu, de confondre deux choses très différentes: d'une part l'ensemble du cosmos et des lois naturelles qui le régissent, matière et énergies; cela c'est le côté Zeus; et l'on peut bien appeler cela Dieu, mais c'est en enlevant à ce mot toute signification morale et personnelle. D'autre part, le faisceau de tous les efforts humains vers le beau... ceci c'est le côté Prométhée et c'est le côté Christ aussi bien; c'est l'épanouissement de l'homme et toutes les vertus y concourent." (2)

Any traditional conception of God whether as comforter or watchdog, and, in fact, any form of mysticism whatsoever, is inadmissible to the hero. His duty is to

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1. L'Evolution du Théâtre, O.C. IV, p. 214 (1904) Declaring his passion for "la psychologie religieuse", Gide told Mallet "Je suis plus un psychologue, un moraliste, qu'un métaphysicien." (Une Mort Ambiguë, p. 49)
  2. Deux Interviews Imaginaires, p. 53



"apprendre à s'en passer." (1) Man's need for spirituality is transposed into faith, not in the divine, but in the human, in man. Not, however, Gide adds, man as he is, rather, man as he could be. "Je crois moins volontiers aux dieux qu'aux héros." (2) This is the hero's greatest duty - in the words of Egée to Thésée "Sache montrer aux hommes ce que peut être et se propose de devenir l'un d'entre eux. Il y a de grandes choses à faire. Obtiens-toi." (3)

Gide has always rejected the notion of "l'homme accompli" (4) and maintained that "l'humanité peut plus et vaut mieux." (5) A new man is coming who will fulfill the "admirable possibilities" latent in humanity. "D'où surgira-t-il, cet homme neuf? non du dehors. Camarade, sache le découvrir en toi-même... exige-le de toi, cet homme attendu... Ose devenir qui tu es." (6) Gide's

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1. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, R.R.S., p. 279. In 1943 Gide wrote, "De plus en plus, de mieux en mieux, l'homme est appelé à se suffire." (J. II, p. 208) Nietzsche maintained that there are three stages in man's history: i) One sacrificed human beings to one's Gods; ii) One sacrificed one's own strongest instincts to one's gods (Christian virtues of abstinence and abnegation) and, iii) One must sacrifice God (i.e. comfort, hope, reliance etc.) to oneself. This is the task of the new generation. Jenseits von Gut und Böse, Sect. 55, Werke, Vol. II, p. 616
  2. Oedipe, T.C. Vol. IV, p. 91
  3. Thésée, R.R.S., p. 1416
  4. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, R.R.S., p. 291
  5. Thésée, R.R.S., p. 1448. This idea forms the theme of Book IV of Les Nouvelles Nourritures.
  6. Les Nouvelles Nourritures, R.R.S., p. 292

advice to the next generation in Les Nouvelles Nourritures is a call to heroism. And the projection of that effort towards a higher form of humanity is God.

Surely, then, this "God" is the same indefinite "quelque chose qui dépassait en valeur la vie humaine" which Gide identified earlier as "la source de tout héroïsme." It is both the determiner of all values, and the only agent to which the individual should sacrifice himself. It both proceeds from man, yet subjugates him. In short, Gide's conception of God is directly linked to his idea of heroism. As in Christian tradition, the individual's greatest goal and only master is God; but for Gide, God is the progress of humanity. After admitting the heroism implicit in the true Christian's way of life, he adds that the same virtues which he admires in "la sainteté" (abnegation, courage, determination, etc.) are inherent in the true followers of humanism. "Tout héros n'est pas nécessairement un chrétien...Le non-acquiescement à des dogmes peut mener certains jusqu'au martyre...sans aller jusque là, disons que la dignité humaine et cette sorte de tenue morale...où nous rattachons aujourd'hui nos espoirs, se passe volontiers du soutien et du réconfort de la Foi." (1)

Bearing in mind our discussion of Gide's aspirations

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1. Deux Interviews, p. 46-47

to martyrdom in Chapter I, we may be justified in claiming that Gide saw himself in just this position. He incorporated into his works and his life a new, heroic philosophy. He refused to preach this philosophy or this faith, yet by his example he became for the new generations, a Prometheus, delivering them from the tyranny of the Titans and giving them freedom and dignity.

## Chapter VII: The Heroic in Art.

In considering artistic creativity as a function of the heroic, we will try and discover what Gide envisaged as the ideal way to write, discuss the relationship between his guidelines for heroism in ethics and those in art, and investigate the part played in the hero's overall way of life by artistic creativity.

Gide's aesthetic thinking included many of the same premises as his general thinking on heroism. The same natural tendency towards order and restraint which led him to control the passionate individualism of his twenties resulted in the formation of an almost classical approach to art. In 1899 he wrote "l'œuvre d'art ne s'obtient que par contrainte, et par la soumission du réalisme à l'idée de beauté préconçue." (1) The statement could have been made by Racine, Flaubert or Leconte de Lisle. "L'amour du désordre est incapable de produire une œuvre d'art," Gide wrote to Rouveyre fifteen years later. "Mes livres sont là pour le prouver; si tout mon être ne tendait pas à l'ordre et à l'harmonie, je n'aurais jamais pu les écrire, et je n'en aurais pas eu le désir." (2)

1. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 209 (Gide's italics)

2. 10 November, 1924, Correspondance, (Mercure de France, 1967), p. 89. This letter is in the O.C. (XII, p. 262-63)

But as we have come to expect with Gide, the matter does not end here. Edouard qualifies this position in art with the same reminder that Corydon raises in ethics (p. 75).

"Je crois volontiers qu'on n'est artiste qu'à condition de dominer l'état lyrique; mais il importe, pour le dominer de l'avoir éprouver d'abord." (1) Once again Gide applies the same rules to ethics and art; in fact his whole theory of freedom in balance is transposed en bloc to the realm of aesthetics. "La morale consiste à supplanter l'être naturel (le vieil homme) par un être factice préféré... Je trouve ceci: le vieil homme, c'est le poète. L'homme nouveau...c'est l'artiste. Il faut que l'artiste supprime le poète; de la lutte entre les deux naît l'oeuvre d'art." (2)

The protagonists are basically the same: Romanticism ("toujours accompagné d'orgueil et d'infatuation") and Classicism (whose main tenet is "modestie"); (3) inspiration and discipline; idealism and realism; in other words, the old dichotomy of individualism and restraint. Describing

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1. Les Faux-Monnayeurs, O.C. XII, p. 446

2. J. I, p. 30 (1892)

3. Réponse à une Enquête, O.C. X, p. 25-26

his systeme of harmonizing opposing forces Gide says,  
 "Plus sauvage et plus persistante avait été la discordance,  
 plus large est l'épanouissement de l'accord." (1)

Again, the same guideline is proposed for the work of art.

"L'oeuvre est d'autant plus belle que la chose soumise  
 était d'abord plus révoltée." (2)

Recognizing in the works of Shakespeare, Chopin and  
 many others, as well as in his own creations, the value of  
 "le romantisme dompté" (3) Gide goes on to specify the  
 nature of the restraint which must control without suppressing.  
 "Si la matière est soumise par avance, l'oeuvre est  
 froide et sans intérêt." (4) Both forces must be maintained  
 throughout the process: "Je ne veux non plus dire que l'oeuvre  
 d'art la plus accomplie serait celle qui se tiendrait à la  
 plus égale distance de l'idéalisme et du réalisme; non certes!  
 et l'artiste peut bien se rapprocher autant qu'il osera  
 d'un des deux pôles, mais à condition qu'il ne quittera  
 pas du talon le second." (5) Works produced very close to  
 either pole may be of equal merit but of very different  
 appeal. Thus Gide can read Phèdre or Cinna again and again,

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1. J. I, p. 842 (1927)

2. Réponse à une Enquête sur le Classicisme, O.C. X, p. 26

3. Billets à Angèle, O.C. XI, p. 35-43

4. Réponse à une Enquête, p. 26

5. Les Limites de l'Art, O.C. III, p. 408

"avec un ravissement et une admiration extrêmes", (1)  
and claim that Maldoror "m'exalte jusqu'au délire." (2)

The artist, then must incorporate "les qualités  
les plus contraires, les plus contradictoires en apparence;  
force et douceur, tenue et grâce, logique et abandon,  
précision et poésie." (3)

Not only does Gide impose the same limits on freedom  
in art and ethics, the two realms become themselves opposing,  
yet complimentary forces in the heroic artist. Complexity  
is a prerequisite to creativity, and the catharsis of  
creation works to preserve and maintain opposing forces  
in equilibrium. "On ne produit qu'à condition d'être  
riche en antagonismes." (4) And conversely, the process  
of production or creation of characters allows full play  
to first one, then another of the forces within the artist;  
and, through this process, equilibrium can most successfully  
be established, raising the artist above the lutte.

Accused of "inquiétude perpétuelle", Gide answers "J'ai  
pu être inquiet...et je le serais sans doute encore, si

1. J. II, p. 71

2. J. I, p. 183

3. Billets à Angèle, O.C. XI, p. 37.

4. Prétextes, p. 140 In a letter to Du Bos in 1920 Gide says  
"Le secret du grand romancier est...dans la multiplicité  
de ses possibilités, de ses complicités intimes.." (O.C.  
X, p. 550) See also J. I, p. 781 (1924)

je n'avais pas su délivrer mes diverses possibilités dans mes livres et projeter hors de moi les personnages contradictoires qui m'habitaient. Le résultat de cette purgation morale, c'est un grand calme; osons dire: une certaine sérénité." (1)

Like Thésée, then, Gide did reach a period of contentment and serenity, not because he became reconciled with humanity on the social level, but because of the creation of a legacy. Both the act of creation itself and the assurance that something had been secured "à l'abri de la mort" served as a source of satisfaction and peace.

We earlier established a distinction between the reality of everyday life - human emotions, social relations etc. and Gide's concept of heroism which remains on an idealistic, almost theoretical plane. We also maintained that this distinction remained throughout his life, in spite of the social altruism of his later years. The essence of André Gide - his art - belonged, throughout his life, to that same otherworldly sphere as his heroism. "Je voudrais pouvoir

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1. Letter to Rouveyré, 5 November, 1924. Correspondance, p. 87. Gide's Catholic friends, like Rouveyré, assumed that as he hadn't come to terms with religion or attained social stability, he couldn't "trouver le calme". Gide explains that "C'est qu'ils ne supposaient point, n'admettaient point que l'inquiétude put prendre fin ailleurs que dans le port où ils se sont ancrés eux-mêmes, et que, tant qu'ils me croyaient ballotté, ils pouvaient encore espérer que je vinsse chercher refuge parmi eux". Feuillets, J. I, p. 901 (1928)



considérer l'oeuvre d'un artiste comme un microcosme complet, étrange tout entier où pourtant toute la complexité de la vie se retrouve. Je voudrais y sentir une philosophie spéciale, une morale spéciale, une langue spéciale..." (1)

This argument can be expanded to claim that neither Gide's concept of heroism nor his aesthetic theories are natural, that is, based on reality or nature, but merely theoretical. This may be true, but Gide has always proposed a variety of levels of reality. He first conceived of a second level, beyond the accepted every day type of reality when he was seven years old. Even then it was a magical world to be striven after, and where all was beautiful and heroic. And in Ainsi Soit-il he confesses that he still can't accept the traditional form of reality.

(2) Natural? Gide would argue for his own interpretation of that word. He distinguishes between "ces deux "naturels" - extérieur et intime - qui s'opposent et ... c'est selon celui-ci que celui-là se façonne et s'informe." (3)

When Gide attempted to reverse these roles and have his art serve the causes of exterior or social reality, the magic vanished. "Si les questions sociales occupent"

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1. Billets à Angèle, O.C. III, p. 165 (Gide's italics)

2. J.II, p. 1164

3. Les Limites de l'Art, O.C. III, p. 405-06

aujourd'hui ma pensée," he writes in 1932, "c'est aussi que le démon créateur s'en retire." (1) Recognizing the inferiority of his "oeuvres engagées" he decided that it is impossible to reconcile the two worlds. "Je préfère ne plus rien écrire, plutôt que de plier mon art à des fins utilitaires." (2)

Along with "les questions sociales" Gide excluded traditional or ready-made concepts of morality from his secret, fictional world. Here, at least, his heroism would be allowed full play, without fear of harming the majority. In 1891 he wrote "La question morale pour l'artiste, n'est pas que l'idée qu'il manifeste soit plus ou moins morale et utile au grand nombre; la question est qu'il la manifeste bien. -Car tout doit être manifesté même les plus funestes choses..." (3) He restated the same theory a few years before his death, "Pour moi, un acte n'est moral que s'il est beau". (4)

And yet this heroic world, "la création du cerveau",

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1. J. I, p. 1139.

2. Ibid., p. 1149. Gide's happiest moments during the last two decades of his life occurred when he broke this resolution and returned to writing, even to the extent of translating or preparing some work of his for the stage. (Ainsi Soit-il, J. II, p. 1169).

3. Le Traité du Narcisse, R.R.S., p. 8-9

4. Cited by Pierre-Quint, André Gide, p. 499. Gide continues, "C'est ainsi que j'explique mon goût pour l'Immoraliste, pour ces figures comme Lafcadio, et Bernard."

is far from being immoral. We have seen the rigorous standards of restraint and balance imposed by Gide in order to "manifester bien". For this reason he can claim, "L' immoralité transcendante de l'artiste est, à sa façon, moralité suprême." (1)

Thus the heroic in art, as in ethics, meant for Gide, the freedom to impose one's own brand of restraint. In other words, freedom from the moral or social obligation of following a pre-set conventional pattern. Gide's own creative process is heroic both in its method, and in its material; inspiration and discipline combine to produce a complex inner reality of richness, heroism and freedom which is recreated in his works.

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1. Attendu que, Alger, Charlot, 1943, p. 11.

### Conclusion

From his early youth, Gide felt himself "différent des autres". Although, initially, the awareness of this separateness gave rise to feelings of inferiority, Gide soon became convinced that he was one of a select minority. This sense of belonging to a spiritual and artistic elite was an important factor in the later elaboration of his idea of the heroic. Realizing that his own destiny lay in art, he made this destiny heroic by imposing a sense of duty, not to benefit the majority, but to respond "au petit nombre des élus". (1) The method and material were set before he began writing: "Nous devons tous manifester". The only moral stipulation followed soon after: "le manifester bien".

Gide's first fictional hero was an incarnation of this early heroic idea. André Walter was fervent, idealistic and dedicated to purity, God and art. His madness raised serious doubts about the validity of such an ideal. Gide, while retaining the heroic concept of manifestation, rejected

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1. Les Nourritures terrestres, O.C. II, p. 86

his early mysticism, and awoke to the world of the senses, to the earth, and to freedom. Recognizing soon after the dangers and weaknesses of complete liberation, Gide elaborated and tested his new ideal over the next few years by exploring its possibilities in his works. Michel, Saül and Candaule gradually establish the prime tenet of Gide's mature thinking on heroism: emancipation without control can only lead to the dissolution of the will and the personality. Prométhée and Philoctète apply this control to its proper object - one's own most heroic possibilities. This stage represents for Gide, his more or less definitive view of heroism. In Feuillets d'Automne he restates the same stand, "...la vertu, c'est ce que l'individu peut obtenir de soi de meilleur." (1)

This special concept of duty towards oneself was accompanied by a full transferral of moral values from the religious and social setting to the humanistic and individual. And because Gide's concept of heroism was, from the beginning, associated with his thinking on

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1. J. II, p. 310

aesthetics, a growing correlation developed between heroic individualism and art, which tended to oppose both reality and society.

Gide, then, had arrived at a definite view of the heroic, a view with "une philosophie spéciale, une morale spéciale, une langue spéciale." The heroic way of life he proposes is based on the freedom of the individual. But it is not freedom in the sense of ordinary terminology. Freedom for Gide meant self-determination; but it also meant balance and restraint. Near the end of his life, he would say through Oedipe, "...de mon exemple ils n'ont pris que ce qui les flatte, les autorisations, la licence, laissant échapper la contrainte: le difficile et le meilleur."

(1)

The first duty of the Gidean hero to himself is to emancipate himself from the old, authoritarian morality. He must reject the comforts and security of material possessions and spiritual shelters such as religion and family. In the words of one young disciple, he must "faire une table rase pour être neuf à la loi nouvelle." (2)

Once liberated, he must begin the task of shaping

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1. Oedipe, Théâtre Complet, vol. IV, p. 110.
  2. Letter from Bernard Enginger, J. II, p. 294 (1946).

a new, more heroic life, by recognizing but controlling his instincts, and subjecting himself to a variety of experiences which will bring to the surface new responses and reveal new potentialities. For Gide, and probably for many other "heroic natures" these experiences must be extreme, vigorous, new, and containing an element of risk. For other equally heroic natures, this might involve a life of physical action, or a life dedicated to an ideal, whether religious or social. "J'ai n'ai jamais cherché que d'encourager chacun dans sa voie et ne voudrais tirer à moi personne." (1)

Gide admits that his main contribution in the inspiration of such heroes lies in the first stages - the tearing down of old values. He realizes that art cannot provide an answer for most people. Each hero must find his own path; his goal is the fulfillment of whatever heroic potentiality he possesses - the "quelque chose qui dépassait en valeur la vie humaine," and which differs for each of us. And Gide never claimed to do more than this. "Déjà j'aurai beaucoup fait si j'enlève Dieu de l'autel."

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1. Un Esprit non Prévenu, p. 45.

et mets l'Homme à sa place." (1) The old values have been destroyed; it is up to the reader to build new ones. "Jette mon livre," Gide says in Les Nourritures terrestres, "dis-toi bien que ce n'est là qu'une des milles postures possibles en face de la vie. Cherche la tienne." (2)

In spite of Gide's efforts to "inventer un héros responsable" (3) he was forced late in life to return to his earlier conclusion that whereas ethics and aesthetics are inextricably bound together in his particular heroic ideal, social concern was alien to all three. "Il s'agit de savoir si l'on est pour le plus grand nombre ou pour l'élite...Ce n'est pas seulement question d'humanité, d'humanitarisme: l'art et la culture sont l'enjeu." (4)

Gide's own answer is evident. He belongs to an heroic elite, and is convinced that the portrayal of this type of heroism, this superior way of life, is the greatest service that he as an artist can offer to the majority. "Ce qui manque le plus à notre littérature d'aujourd'hui, c'est l'héroïsme." (5)

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1. J. II, p. 310. (1947)
  2. Les Nourritures terrestres, O.C. p. 223
  3. J. I, p. 1034 (1931)
  4. J. II, p. 232 (1943)
  5. J. I, p. 1042 (1931)



☉ In the midst of a growing loss of identity on the part of the individual, André Gide's contribution is a firm reinforcement of the status of man in the universe, and of each man in society. His cult of the individual can justifiably be called a cult of heroism, since man, in order to preserve his unique identity today, and make his presence felt in a mechanized world, must develop the strength, courage and will power that has always been associated with the heroic. Man must become better and more heroic, and both Gide and the Gidean hero are dedicated to providing the example and the vigour necessary to direct new generations in this path.

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